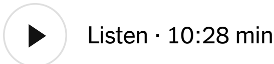
White House Seeks to Impose Political Test on Billions in Federal Grants

A new proposal would allow the administration to block grants if they do not satisfy President Trump's agenda or support what it calls "anti-American" values.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By Tony Romm
Reporting from Washington

June 2, 2026 Updated 11:27 a.m. ET

The White House is seeking to exert more control over billions of dollars in annual government grants, aiming to restrict a vast swath of funding — in health, housing, science and transportation — so that it primarily serves the purposes and organizations politically aligned with President Trump.

While the administration says that its primary goal is to safeguard taxpayer money, its proposal amounts to a major escalation in its attempt to reimagine the nation's spending, even as Congress and the courts continue to rebuke the president for abusing such powers.

Mr. Trump's ambitions were made clear in a roughly 400-page blueprint that was released to little fanfare on Friday. If finalized, it would require all federal grants to be approved by the president's political appointees, who must ensure that the money would "demonstrably advance the president's policy priorities."

For the agencies that issue those awards and the nonprofit groups, local governments, universities and other entities that receive the money, the Trump administration would also impose a set of highly prescriptive and political criteria.

The government could not issue grants to projects or groups that “deny the biological reality of sex or the sex binary in humans,” for example. Nor could it seek to fund initiatives that “promote anti-American values,” contribute to illegal immigration, advance diversity, equity and inclusion or assist in voter registration.

The rules would further limit the ability of grant recipients to engage in some “issue advocacy.” Those that are funded would be scrutinized for their compliance with “religious liberty laws” and their “memberships and affiliations” with outside groups. And they could face the outright termination of their grants if the Trump administration someday determines that their actions are not in the “public interest.”

The restrictions echo the string of executive orders that Mr. Trump signed shortly after returning to office, many of which have been challenged or blocked in court. This time, however, the White House has pursued its restrictions by proposing a regulation, which is expected to become final after the government solicits public comment. The result could be applied far more broadly, and perhaps in ways that are harder to fight legally or undo later, according to budget experts.

The consequences could fall hardest on health and science, a field in which Mr. Trump has pursued some of the steepest cuts in his second term.

In exchange for federal assistance, researchers would face limits on the subjects that they can explore, the foreign labs with which they may collaborate and even the conferences at which they can appear. Dr. Georges C. Benjamin, the chief executive of the American Public Health Association, a professional organization and advocacy group, said the policy could “devastate innovation, science and research” in the United States.

The proposed rules reaffirmed the view of Russell T. Vought, the head of the Office of Management and Budget, that much of the government's ledger is riddled with spending that is wasteful, "divisive" or "woke." Kenny Holston/The New York Times

Dr. Benjamin said the Trump administration sought to "codify a lot of the things they tried to do" over the past year that courts previously had rejected. That included an attempt to cut billions in grant funding for the National Institutes of Health, which his association sued to stop.

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While Dr. Benjamin said he could not predict what legal steps, if any, his group might take in response to the newest White House proposal, he said of its publication generally, "You can be sure this is going to be challenged."

An official at the White House budget office, who would only describe the administration's thinking on the condition of anonymity, said the proposed regulations were consistent with the president's recent directives and current law.

The official said that the goal was to promote transparency, efficiency and accountability around federal grants, which would now be suspended if they are not in compliance with the new rules.

The Trump administration would also require those that receive government aid to scrutinize the use of taxpayer dollars more closely for fraud. In general, its policies would not apply to all federal spending, meaning that money doled out based on criteria established in law — like entitlement programs, block grants and other spending mandates — would not be affected.

“The whole idea here is to basically have one control tower,” said Daniel Kowalski, a budget expert at the conservative-leaning Heritage Foundation. “There’s one executive, and all the agencies should be working to implement the executive’s agenda.”

The proposal was only the latest attempt by the Office of Management and Budget, led by Russell T. Vought, to exert power over federal funding. The preamble to its sprawling new blueprint reaffirmed Mr. Vought’s view that much of the government’s ledger is riddled with spending that is wasteful, “divisive” or “woke.”

The language mirrored Mr. Trump’s past budget proposals, which Democrats and Republicans on Capitol Hill have rejected over the past year, fearing the president’s proposed cuts could undermine critical government services. Yet Mr. Trump has frequently disregarded the instructions of Congress anyway, opting to move around or outright cancel billions of dollars in congressionally approved spending.

So far, the administration has stalled or blocked aid for child care, disaster preparedness, green energy, education, food stamps, foreign assistance, mental health, public broadcasting, research and transportation infrastructure, according to court records and public statements. In cases that date back to the early, disruptive days of the Department of Government Efficiency, judges have found that many of Mr. Trump’s actions have violated the law.

Cerin Lindgrensavage, a lawyer at Protect Democracy, a government watchdog, said there are still "absolutely places where, in response to Congress rejecting cuts, that O.M.B. has implemented those cuts unlawfully."

Her organization has sued to force the release of detailed White House budget records, which the administration previously tried to keep secret. Still, Ms. Lindgrensavage said there was a "lot in common" between Mr. Trump's past moves and his newly proposed grant rules, which could further "risk politicizing spending across the federal government."

The regulations, which the White House budget office aims to finalize and put into place by October, would formalize many of Mr. Trump's past executive orders. That includes an August directive that subjected federal grants to heightened political review.

Sarah Saadian, the senior vice president of public policy and campaigns at National Council of Nonprofits, which represents more than 30,000 organizations, said the regulatory blueprint was an attempt by the White House to "achieve what they haven't been able to achieve in courts."

Ms. Saadian's group successfully fought the administration in the opening days of Mr. Trump's second term, when his budget office tried to freeze all federal spending. With the newly proposed restrictions, she warned that many nonprofits — which receive federal grants to provide child care, health, housing and other services on behalf of the U.S. government — may simply decide it is "not worth the risk" to seek funding.

"Communities will be shut out of federal programs, even though Congress passes funding for those programs," she said.

In the weeks before it proposed the new regulations, the White House appeared to foreshadow its tactics. A memo from the budget office issued in May instructed federal agencies to inventory all of the grants provided to "certain nonprofit organizations," according to a copy viewed by The New York Times.

The memo targeted about four dozen organizations, including the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Urban League and some legal aid groups, the materials show. The White House request appeared similar to one it sent months earlier that looked to restrict money primarily to states led by Democrats.

Still, much remains unclear about how the White House might actually enact its new regulations. That includes how far it would go to apply some of its proposed restrictions that prohibit the use of federal dollars for "issue advocacy" or for "initiatives that compromise public safety or promote anti-American values."

Many researchers expressed particular alarm about the implications for their work, citing the risks in having political appointees, not subject-matter experts, deciding the merit of scientific pursuits.

"It means that all grants, not just science grants, are now subject to the rules that are defined by the White House, rather than by a technical agency," said Cole Donovan, the director of science policy and advocacy at Stand Up for Science, a group that supports federal research spending. He previously served as an international technology adviser in the Biden administration.

Since returning to office, Mr. Trump has pursued vast cuts to funding at agencies like the National Institutes of Health. His attempts to revoke billions of dollars there have ping-ponged around federal courts, but the legal challenges have not stopped the administration from slowing down the delivery of that funding in other ways.

The newly proposed regulations specifically require political appointees to fund only "gold standard science." That is a reference to an executive order signed by Mr. Trump last year that prompted many researchers to express outrage about the politicization of their work and the attempt to undermine scientific independence.

"This is a major escalation in the Trump administration's war on science and its efforts to choke off funding to whatever communities Trump decides to target," said Senator Patty Murray, Democrat of Washington, who leads her party on the

Senate Appropriations Committee. She added in a statement that “Republicans should work with Democrats to stop this rule in its tracks.”

Tony Romm is a reporter covering economic policy and the Trump administration for The Times, based in Washington.

Technology

See which jobs are most threatened by AI and who may be able to adapt

It’s the most urgent question about artificial intelligence — and one of the hardest to answer.

By Kevin Schaul and Shira Ovide

March 16, 2026

As artificial intelligence becomes more capable, some jobs may remain in demand while others decline. **Web designers** and **secretaries** are more at risk than **janitors**, according to one recent study.

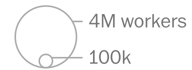
Scroll to continue

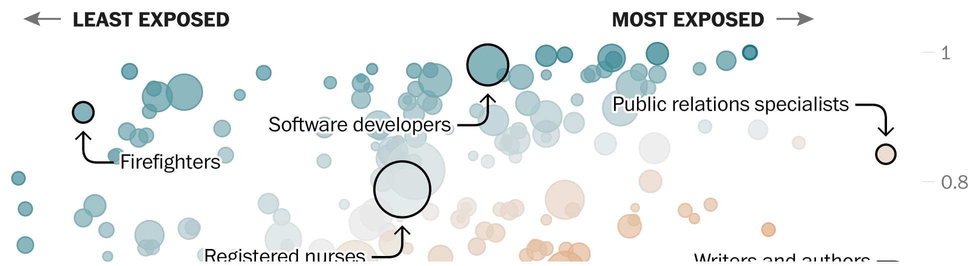
But there’s another dimension to the picture. Some workers will find it easier to adapt, the researchers argue, based on factors like their savings, age and transferrable skills.

Most **web designers** will be fine. Many **secretaries** will not. The most vulnerable occupations are largely held by women.

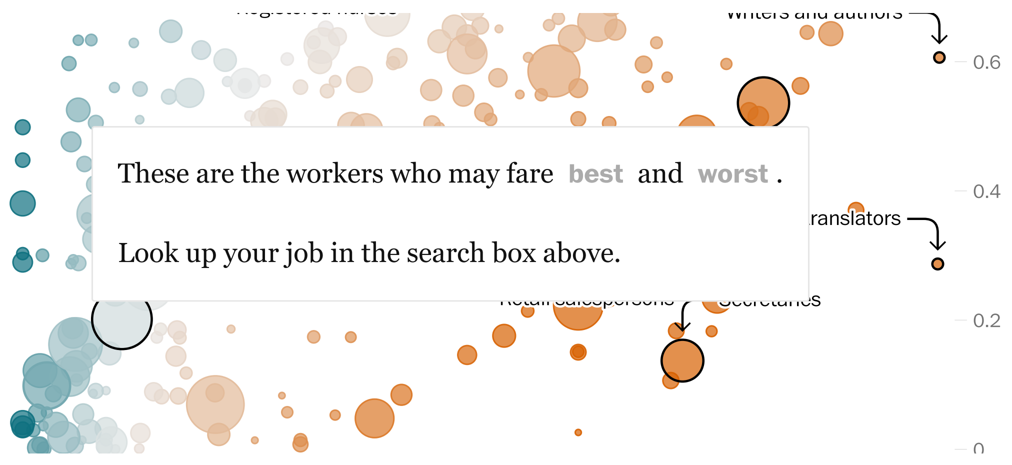
Jobs least and most vulnerable to AI

Find your job





MOST ADAPTABLE



No one has a perfect road map to the future, but researchers at GovAI, which studies technology policy, and the Brookings Institution, a Washington think tank, used a novel approach to estimate which workers may be most and least able to adapt to AI.

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They concluded that many people most at risk if AI transforms work are also the best placed to find new jobs. You can use the search box and interactive chart above to explore which occupations may have bright prospects and which may not.

But history shows that economists and researchers have been terrible at predicting the effects of new technologies on work and workers, so take forecasts like this one seriously but not literally. Even researchers cranking out studies of AI in workplaces caution that they're making useful but fallible best guesses.

“All the important questions about AI’s effects on the labor market are still unanswered,” Jed Kolko, a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, recently concluded. Economists at Anthropic, the AI start-up behind the Claude chatbot, stressed the need for “humility” in their analysis of AI seeping into occupations. (Humility is uncommon in Silicon Valley.)

Sifting through reports about AI-related job displacement will make you dizzy with the apparent contradictions.

One influential Stanford University analysis last year found it’s probable that AI is bleeding jobs from young people in occupations such as software development and customer service, where AI adoption has been fastest. Different research, from the Economic Innovation Group think tank, essentially concluded the opposite, that young workers in those occupations were faring better than their peers in less AI-exposed fields such as fitness training and roofing.

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The Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas has said it’s unlikely AI is coming for jobs in the next decade, while prominent CEOs keep predicting that AI will put millions of people out of work soon.

A flood of sometimes conflicting analyses shows the yawning gap between what little is known about how AI is changing work and everyone’s understandable hunger for certainty. The divide lets Americans, business leaders and policymakers cherry-pick their preferred narratives. If you’re afraid of being cast aside for AI, there’s informed and uninformed evidence to fuel your nightmares. There’s plenty of support, too, if you think your job is safe.

Two points of general agreement stand out: There’s no measurable evidence so far that AI is putting Americans as a whole out of work, economists say. And

while the victims of past workplace automation were mostly factory and trade workers, it's white collar jobs that are first in line for AI shake-ups today.

That's where the recent research, led by Sam Manning, a senior research fellow at GovAI, and his colleague Tomás Aguirre, took a novel approach.

They started with an industry-standard measure of more than 350 occupations' AI "exposure." That estimates how many job-related tasks a worker can plausibly do more efficiently with AI, such as a teacher grading homework.

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Those estimates find that skills used in computer programming, marketing, financial analysis and customer service have high overlap with AI capabilities, and therefore in theory workers might be more easily replaced by machines. (There are spicy debates in economics over measuring AI "exposure" and whether high AI exposure helps or hurts workers.)

The researchers went one step further and also sought to quantify how easily people within occupations could shift to other good-paying work if AI killed their jobs. The researchers figured that people with more education and varied work experience could more easily switch occupations, and that it would help to be wealthier, under 55 years old and live in cities where jobs are plentiful.

While web designers and secretaries both scored high in the research for exposure to AI, they diverged in their estimated ability to adapt. Secretaries were among the 6.1 million largely clerical and administrative workers considered both highly exposed to AI and with the lowest estimated adaptability, Manning and Aguirre found. (Manning is also affiliated with the technology policy research group the Foundation for American Innovation.)

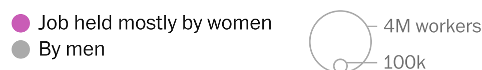
The young woman at left works as a secretary in a New York City office in 1947. (Eric Schwab/AFP/Getty Images)

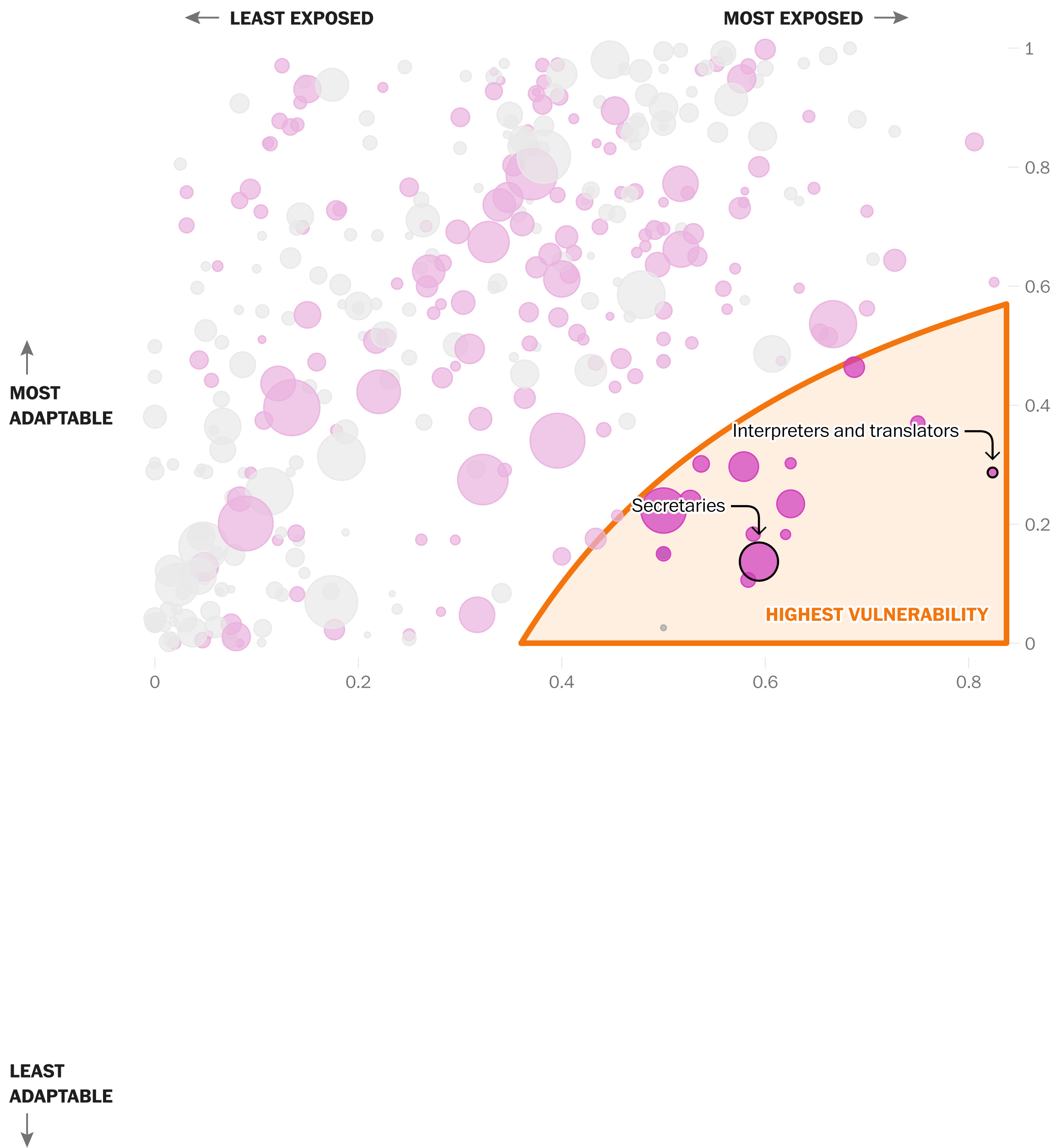
The findings suggest that the majority of workers whose jobs may be transformed by or lost to AI can bounce back. But a smaller share of workers may have a harder time finding new jobs.

Women make up about 86 percent of those most vulnerable workers, the researchers said, suggesting the negative effects of automation won't be borne equally across society.

Mark Muro, a senior fellow at Brookings who assessed the policy relevance of the research, said the most vulnerable workers "may be out of sight and out of mind" to policymakers and the American public. The researchers cautioned that it's hard to accurately assess the likelihood of people finding other jobs.

Women hold jobs that are most vulnerable to automation





Sources: GovAI and Brookings Institution

Allison Elias, a professor at the University of Virginia business school, said that previous technology shifts show why people in female-dominated clerical occupations might be on the losing end of the AI revolution.

In her historical research, secretaries and other administrative staff often hoped that new technologies would free them to do higher-level work and help advance

their careers. Instead, she said, workers were often expected to do more work for the same or lower pay. They continued to report low levels of job satisfaction.

"These people are really vulnerable because they won't have a lot of decisions over how AI is used, and their exit opportunities are going to be pretty low," said Elias, who was not involved in the GovAI and Brookings analysis.

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Economists say it's nearly impossible to forecast AI's effect on the labor market from the current capabilities of the technology or the business sectors it's seeping into first. And they point to the track record of past technology revolutions, such as electricity and smartphones, that eliminated some types of jobs but also created new work and economic growth few foresaw.

The predictions mostly didn't pan out from a prominent study more than a decade ago that estimated nearly half of jobs could be destroyed by computer automation. Forecasts were off base that ATMs would wipe out bank tellers, that earlier forms of AI would decimate radiologists and that player pianos would kill the jobs of pianists. Few people imagined that smartphones would usher in new jobs in social media marketing and influencing. And you're probably not experiencing the 15-hour workweek that economist John Maynard Keynes forecasted in 1930.

"We do not have a good track record of predicting how technological change will play out in the labor market," said Martha Gimbel, executive director of the Budget Lab at Yale University. It would have been hard to predict that the invention of electricity would lead to the new occupation of elevator operators, and that a subsequent innovation — "buttons," she said — would wipe out those jobs.

Some of the 300 operators and supervisors required to run the switchboard at the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, in 1942. (AP)

Another extinct occupation, telephone switchboard operators, offers reasons for both hope and pessimism about AI's effects. It was once one of the most common jobs for American women, but jobs were wiped out as telephones modernized starting in the early 20th century, according to a research paper published in 2024 by James Feigenbaum and Daniel Gross.

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Switchboard operators who lost their jobs were far more likely than their peers to never find other work or to take lower-paying jobs, the research found. But within years, new opportunities opened for young women as secretarial and

restaurant work boomed. “I read that as somewhat hopeful,” Feigenbaum, a Boston University economic historian, said in an interview.

Feigenbaum doesn’t buy the argument that AI will be much different for American workers than prior technology revolutions. The invention of electricity, the internal combustion engine and the internet were massively transformative technologies, he said, and “that didn’t eliminate all jobs.”

Taylor Telford contributed to this report.

698 Comments

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NEWS SERVICE: TECHNOLOGY

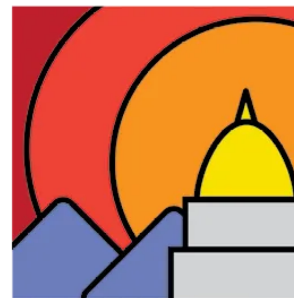
AI policy group makes recommendations on tweaks to Colorado's first-of-its-kind artificial intelligence law

The working group recommendations still need to be ironed out at the state Capitol in a bill and would need to clear the legislature this session

Bente Birkeland, Colorado Public Radio
8:44 PM MDT on Mar 17, 2026

A committee formed by Gov. Jared Polis to come up with a framework for tweaking a state law regulating "consequential" decision making by artificial intelligence systems released its proposals Tuesday.

The the AI Policy Working Group was tasked with recommending changes to a **2024 law** that has never gone into effect because of disagreements about how it should be set up to balance consumer protections with innovation and workability.



This story was produced as part of the Colorado Capitol News Alliance. It first appeared at **cpr.org**.

The law was **originally supposed to take effect** last month, but the state legislature delayed its implementation date to June 2026 to give lawmakers more time to tweak the policy.

The working group, in its recommendations, tried to tackle AI transparency and liability, the thorniest issues in the law.

It recommended that Colorado law require that an AI developer describe key parts of the system to clients who use it to make key decisions, known as deployers, on things such as the tool's intended use, categories of data used to train the system, its limitations, and instructions on appropriate monitoring, and "meaningful human review, where applicable."

The user of the AI system, under the recommendations, would also need to tell the public, in plain language, the role the AI system played in making a consequential decision. A business, government entity, or school that uses AI to make a consequential decision would also need to provide "a clear and conspicuous notice to consumers."

When something goes wrong, liability would be assigned to the deployers and developers based on the role they played in what went wrong, the working group recommended.

The attorney general's office, under the recommendations, would create rules on disclosures a deployer must provide to a consumer following an adverse outcome involving an AI system.

The working group recommendations still need to be turned into a bill and passed by the legislature this year before taking effect.

"I am very grateful to the hardworking members of the Colorado AI Policy Working Group that have reached a unanimous agreement on AI policy to protect consumers and support innovation in our state," Polis said in a written statement.

The Colorado Technology Association, which participated in the working group, said it voted to move the framework forward based on "targeted revisions."

"We look forward to seeing this progress reflected in the forthcoming legislation and to continuing the dialogue on how to protect consumers while enabling innovation to thrive," said CTA President Brittany Morris Saunders.

Democratic state Rep. Brianna Titone of Arvada was a sponsor of the 2024 law. She said the recommendations are a good place to start, but said it's not clear that a bill with those parameters could get through the legislative process without significant changes.

"While the voting members did agree, there were many caveats to their 'yes' votes. It's a meaningful step forward, but only if the proposed bill can stay on this trajectory," Titone said.

Senate Majority Leader Robert Rodriguez, D-Denver, was the main sponsor of the 2024 law. He said he appreciates the task force's work and looks forward to reading the recommendations.

"The devil's in the details," he said. "I've expressed to the governor's office my priority is to make sure that they're letting the consumer know that they have access to the decision, and an opportunity to correct. Those are my core values."

Rodriguez said he wants the law to have teeth.

This story was produced by the Capitol News Alliance, a collaboration between KUNC News, Colorado Public Radio, Rocky Mountain PBS, and The Colorado Sun, with support from news outlets throughout the state. Startup funding for the Alliance was provided in part by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

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Census data shows population losses in Colorado resort counties amid housing, cost pressures

Andrea Teres-Martinez Apr 30, 2026

Article quotes Jeffrey Woodruff, Randy George and Erin McCuskey

The U.S. Census Bureau's county-level population estimates published on March 26 show Colorado is seeing overall growth, though some Western Slope counties have seen population declines in the past year.

Austin Colbert/The Aspen Times

Editor's note: An earlier version of this story incorrectly listed Grand County among counties that saw net population losses between 2024 and 2025. The correct county is Routt County.

Population losses in several of Colorado's Western Slope resort counties underscore a growing trend: as housing and cost-of-living pressures mount, more residents are moving out than moving in.

Overall, the state of Colorado continues to experience positive population growth, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's county-level population estimates published on March 26.

From July 2024 to July 2025, the state saw a 0.4% increase in residents, equal to more than 24,000 people. The state also saw more births than deaths — a product of a low death rate offsetting a steadily declining birth rate.

However, the 0.4% increase is significantly less compared to the kind of growth the state saw before 2020, which could signal that Colorado has begun to lose its appeal as a popular destination for movers, according to the Common Sense Institute of Colorado's analysis of the census estimates. The institute is a think tank that promotes free enterprise policy.

A significant factor behind Colorado's slowed population growth is a slowdown of domestic migration. While the state's population growth 10 years ago was primarily driven by people moving to Colorado from other states, the most recent census estimates reveal natural change — births versus deaths — now plays a larger part in maintaining the state's population.

Census estimates rank the state 48th in the nation for domestic migration as a share of the population and 44th for net migration. Ten years ago, Colorado was third in the nation for domestic migration as a share of population, according to the Common Sense Institute report.

The population gained from net migration into Colorado was 20 times less in 2025 than it was in 2015. In total from July 2024 to July 2025, Colorado gained 3,256 people from net migration compared to 20,608 from births minus deaths. The gain in migration is thanks to the arrival of 15,356 international migrants, which offset the state's net loss of 12,100 domestic

migrants.

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Other factors behind negative net migration have been influenced by national movements, such as slower job growth, higher interest rates and changes in immigration policy, according to a March release from the Colorado State Demography Office.

“At least some portion of the domestic out-migration is made up of recently arrived international migrants (arriving between 2022 and 2024) who have moved to other states as Colorado was not their intended final destination,” the office said in its March release. Counties that received the highest numbers of international migrants were more likely to see net negative domestic migration from their move to other states or counties in 2025.

Western Slope counties see population declines

While several Western Slope counties also share in the state’s domestic migration slowdown, the region’s births, deaths and international migration weren’t enough to save resort towns from a dip in population.

Between 2024 and 2025, counties including Eagle, Pitkin, Summit, Garfield and Routt saw net population losses between 344 and 126 residents. Similarly to statewide trends, rural mountain counties experienced a drop in domestic migration, though natural change was not enough to offset the number of people moving out of the Western Slope.

This is a shift from the cumulative population trends from 2020 to 2025, which show positive population growth for most Western Slope counties with the exception of Eagle and Pitkin counties.

Of the 24 counties that have experienced a population decline since the 2020 Census, Eagle County is among the top three seeing the largest declines with a loss of 1,430 residents since 2020. The other two counties — Jefferson and Boulder counties — both lost over 2,000, a notably lower percentage of their approximately 580,400 and 328,500 populations, respectively.

Pitkin, though having lost a smaller quantity of residents since 2020, saw a larger percentage decrease of its overall population — around 4.2%.

While births continue to outpace deaths for most of rural western Colorado, domestic migration paints a significantly different picture. Out of the state's 64 counties, 30 saw negative domestic migration, including several Western Slope counties housing resort ski towns.

'High housing cost counties' drive out-migration

The impacts of housing opportunities on Grand County's population mirror broader trends seen across the mountain region. According to the State Demography Office, a significant portion of counties that lost populations to other states or counties in 2025 were considered "high housing cost counties."

The State Demography Office specifically identified Eagle, Pitkin, and Summit counties as areas with higher housing costs that experienced net negative domestic migration.

Pitkin County Commissioner Jeffrey Woodruff said a combination of higher interest rates from international conflict, higher construction costs far exceeding county budgets, and higher shipping costs and tariffs for materials have all weighed on construction budgets.

"This county continues to be both an attractive place to work and live; to recreate and enjoy year round cultural activities. But headwinds include cost

of living in the mountains, with construction costs, regional healthcare costs and homeowners insurance adding to financial burden and acting as a net migration constraint," Woodruff wrote in an email. Pitkin County's 2024 cost of living is over 120% of the national average and is 95% higher than the rest of the state, he added.

On the other hand, many of the counties with the strongest positive net migration in the state were also those that saw some of the largest increases in residential construction. These include Weld (1.9% increase), Douglas (1.6%) and Larimer (0.8%) counties.

Grand County was one of the few Western Slope counties to see gains in population between July 2024 and July 2025, which Grand County Commissioner Randy George credits partially to an increase in housing projects.

"If you look at it over several years, at least five years, the population of Grand County has been relatively stable. … Although there's been a lot of building," George said. "What that means is there are a lot of people that have built second homes, or have built homes that they're using for short-term rentals."

A growing number of retirees aging in place and the county's proximity to the metro area has likely also contributed to positive domestic migration, in addition to a lower cost for homes compared to neighboring ski towns.

"Just like a lot of places, there was a big bump during COVID, when people all of a sudden said, 'Wait a minute, I don't want to be in the metro area, I'll build a place,'" he said. "It has abated some, but people continue to build up here."

For rural towns like those in Eagle and Pitkin counties, factors like mountain terrain and zoning regulation can limit where cities are able to build and expand. For Grand County, space is less of an obstacle.

"We are grand. It's in the name," George said. "We are not hemmed in that way, there is still a fair amount of space available."

Hoping to make housing more accessible, Woodruff said Pitkin County issued $323 million in permits in 2025. A number of employee housing developments are currently under construction, in addition to projects stemming from ongoing partnerships with the West Mountain Regional Housing Coalition on deed restricted units.

Cost of living, business challenges

Aside from housing, one of the biggest challenges faced by mountain resort towns is cost of living, which has been met with departure from both families and businesses. An April report from the Colorado Chamber Foundation found that 98 companies relocated or moved business operations to other states since 2019, taking jobs with them. The companies blamed excessive business regulations and high costs for their decision.

"As you can guess, it's a cost of living challenge that's driving a change in our demographics here," said Erin McCuskey, economic resiliency manager for Eagle County. "I think it's also meaningful to mention that these … demographic shifts are happening nationally, at least in terms of workforce. We have long predicted that our number of active workers was going to start to decrease as we have so many people aging out of the workforce and moving into retirement."

The outflow of domestic migration and lower birth rates have only exacerbated these workforce challenges, especially with some sectors already struggling to hire in rural areas. The Common Sense Institute report said the combination of lower birth rates and a domestic migration slowdown could potentially compound an already-occurring loss of economic activity.

"Policymakers should consider how to avoid a situation in which the two trends feed into each other: businesses leave as fewer skilled and educated

workers are available, and fewer people move from other states as high-paying jobs become scarcer," the report said.

In order to combat these challenges, McCuskey said the Eagle County government launched its Workforce Pipelines and Ecosystem Mapping at the start of 2026 with the goal of expanding access to career pathways and strengthening partnerships with local employers and workforce organizations.

"Our focus is really on retention initiatives," McCuskey said. "Since it is hard for us to relocate workers to our area due to the cost of living challenges and just the lack of housing, we really want to make sure that the people who are here that love being a part of our community can see the great career opportunities that are available to them."

Eagle County is also host to the Northwest Colorado Small Business Development Center, which works with 11 counties on various business support initiatives. The center has advisors who, for no cost, work with businesses to figure out succession plans and protect their assets.

"We're really trying to change the narrative that employers are competing for talent with the business that's across the street from them, or that we're competing between our communities for workforce," McCuskey. "In reality, we in Colorado are competing with other states for our workforce."

Democracy Dies in Darkness

Portland has a wonky secret to building cheaper houses. Other cities are copying.

Portland legalized fourplexes, tiny houses and backyard homes and then sorted out how to actually get them built.

Today at 5:00 a.m. EDT

By Julie Z. Weil

Not so long ago, the house that Laurel Moffat owns in Portland, Oregon, would have been illegal.

Moffat's 900-square-foot space is part of a duplex, sharing a wall with another home. And the two homes are both in the backyard of an older house.

"I'd been looking on and off for three years. I was frustrated. Homes in Portland are really expensive," said Moffat, 30, a health policy analyst for the state of Oregon.

She could afford a house above $400,000, around her county's median home price. But in that price range, she mostly found fixer-uppers and condos with high fees, until she discovered her duplex. "I could afford a much higher-quality house as a first-time home buyer. … For a new build, that wasn't possible except for these infill homes."

As the housing cost crunch has spread from coastal cities to nearly every town in America, and consensus has coalesced around the idea that an undersupply of housing is to blame, many communities have changed their laws to allow more "middle" or "infill" housing in existing neighborhoods. This makes for denser living than a single-family house on a lot, but far less dense than a big apartment building.

Portland now has duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes and six-plexes. Townhouses that stack one behind another, going deep into a lot, rather than all facing the street. Houses in backyards and on wheels. “Cottage clusters” of tiny homes.

While other cities, counties and states have allowed these housing options, Portland has done more than most to create incentives for their construction.

“You can legalize any kind of housing that you want in your city. But whether or not it gets built depends on if it’s a financeable and sellable product,” said Francis Torres, a housing expert at the Bipartisan Policy Center.

Portland determined that the key factor was square footage, specifically a measure known as “floor-area ratio.”

In most of the city, the updated regulations limit the size of a single-family house to half the square footage of its lot — so on a typical 5,000-square-foot lot, the house can be a maximum of 2,500 square feet.

But if developers build something with multiple housing units, they are allowed to go bigger. On that same lot, a duplex could be 3,000 square feet, or a triplex could be 3,500 square feet, or a fourplex could be 4,000 square feet. And developers can count on making more money from those multiple units collectively than from a single-family home.

It seems to have worked: In the first year after the rules went into effect in 2021, 88 percent of new building permits were for middle housing and accessory dwelling units, far outpacing single-family homes. And fourplexes were three times as popular as duplexes and triplexes. The city said last year that it had permitted 1,400 of the denser homes in three years.

While profitable for developers, the new, smaller units tend to be more affordable for buyers, sometimes selling for $300,000 less than neighboring single-family homes.

Overall, the county's home prices have continued to rise. But as a result of the new approach to housing, the curve has started to bend downward. And the increased availability of middle housing has brought prices down for those sorts of homes, dropping from an average of more than $800,000 in 2018 to about $615,000 in 2024.

"We are leading the nation in new starter homes," said Neil Heller, a zoning consultant who lives in Portland and worked on the city's housing policies. "Where most people don't see starter homes at all and it's an extinct species, we are reviving them here."

Heller said Portland had to make a lot of changes to its zoning code, such as allowing homes to be built without their own street front, and allowing cottages to be sold on their own instead of as condos.

The city's efforts were reinforced by changes at the state level. As Portland crafted its Residential Infill Project, Oregon banned single-family-only zoning on most lots in the state in a 2019 law.

The first large U.S. city to do away with single-family zoning was Minneapolis, which had required all lots to be open to duplex and triplex construction earlier that year. Dive deeper

The Minneapolis policy was trumpeted in national headlines. But local housing activists have been disappointed with how it has played out. A court battle slowed down the change. In 2022, Minneapolis permitted 63 new two- to four-unit buildings, according to the Bipartisan Policy Center. Portland, with 1½ times the population, permitted 273 in a year.

“For a lot of housing activists, it feels like we took a step forward, we have a win. And then we don’t see actual physically more housing being built, more people being housed,” said Meghan Howard, a Minneapolis real estate agent and activist.

Minneapolis did not initially offer further incentives for developers to build duplexes or triplexes. If a lot allows for a 2,500-square-foot home, a developer could simply choose to build one single-family house up to 2,500 square feet, or a duplex of two 1,250-square-foot units, or a triplex that fits three homes into the same amount of space.

“It makes for very small, awkward units,” Heller said. When he was hired to work on the zoning code in neighboring St. Paul, he tried not to repeat Minneapolis’s mistakes and offered the Portland model.

In Portland, developers can build up to four units on any lot, or six if they make some of them subsidized affordable units. Trevor Newhart, 34, moved into one of the subsidized units in a six-plex last year.

During a rambling career in which he has worked as a carpenter, fire fighter, farmhand and now bookkeeper, Newhart wasn't sure whether he would ever own a home. "I absolutely love my place," he said of his 900-square-foot three-bedroom home. "It's modest. It's perfectly economically built, space-wise. Everything works great, but you can never really open two doors at the same time. But who needs two doors?"

Newhart's previous reservations about becoming a homeowner hadn't been just about whether he could afford it, but about whether a system in which single-family homeowners always want their homes to increase in value matched his personal ethics. He's glad to be in a dense community, in a home he bought through a community land trust. "We had a missing 80 years where you couldn't do that. I'm really happy we're back on the other side of that."

One of his neighbors in the building, Monica Bradley, had almost given up on the hope of homeownership. "What I would have been able to qualify for probably would need a lot of work, and there, again, do you have the money to do that?" Bradley said. As a single mother, working as a bodyworker, there were times she could barely make ends meet.

Now, in the $320,000 townhouse that she bought with a subsidy, she marvels at "the sense of security that we feel now, where there's no lease ending, there's no rent raise."

"I feel bad for the neighbor who suddenly had six units built next door," Bradley said. "I can understand where that can be uncomfortable, just to say it up straight."

Portland's first residential infill law passed its city council 3-1 in 2020, and the second part of the plan passed unanimously two years later. Some of the other areas of Oregon that have been forced into zoning changes by the state law have resisted them. Dive deeper

But Oregon state representative Mark Gamba, who has pushed for more housing legislation at the state level, argues that a construction boom brings benefits even for people who already own homes in the neighborhood. "You're not going to get a new grocery store to move into an area if it's not dense enough to support that," he said. "If you can create a little more density, you can attract more services to an area."

Gamba said the new units aren't bringing housing prices down as much as he might have hoped, in part because they still represent a small portion of the housing stock. "But I think in the long run, it's going to help," he said.

And for the people who buy the units, it's a type of housing that barely existed before. "It's helping those young families that have good enough jobs that they can get a mortgage for $350,000, but they can never get a mortgage for $500,000," Gamba said. "You're opening the door for a lot of folks that otherwise would never have the opportunity to buy housing."

What readers are saying

The comments on the article express a range of concerns and opinions about increasing housing density through infill housing. Many commenters highlight issues such as inadequate parking, loss of green space, and the potential for decreased property values and community... Show more

This summary is AI-generated. AI can make mistakes and this summary is not a replacement for reading the comments.

ECONOMY

More people are going hungry now than at the height of the pandemic

MAY 27, 2026 · 3:12 PM ET

HEARD ON ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

Scott Horsley

2-Minute Listen

PLAYLIST TRANSCRIPT

More than 3,500 families attended a food distribution event organized by the Houston Food Bank in November.
Mark Felix/AFP

More people in the United States are going hungry now than during the depths of the COVID-19 pandemic six years ago.

PUBLIC HEALTH

In the U.S., hunger is often hidden. But it can still leave scars on body and mind

A survey released Wednesday by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York found higher levels of food insecurity this year than during the summer of 2020, when the coronavirus outbreak sparked double-digit unemployment.

The New York Fed periodically asks Americans whether they're having to skip meals, having to rely on food donations or receiving federal assistance to buy groceries. Replies from the most recent survey, in February, show hunger is a more pervasive problem now than at any time in the last six years.

Amy Breitmann, who runs the Golden Harvest Food Bank in Augusta, Ga., has witnessed the growing number of families and children in need of food.

"We have some distributions where people are sitting in a 2-to-3-mile line the night before a distribution starts," Breitmann says. "They're sleeping in their cars."

The New York Fed survey from February found that nationwide, 10% of families reported missing meals for lack of food and nearly 16% relied on food donations.

Among families earning less than $50,000 a year, rates of food insecurity were about twice as high, with nearly 20% forced to skip meals or go without.

Other states also face increasing food insecurity

The Community Food Bank of Central Alabama, which serves 12 counties in the state, is moving into a larger building to accommodate the increased need.

"Food insecurity could be your next-door neighbor," says Nicole Williams, the CEO of the food bank. "When gas costs a little bit more or food costs a little bit more, or they have a repair on their car or a medical bill, that takes away what they might be using to spend on food."

The results highlight what observers have called a "K-shaped economy," with a growing divide between the haves and have-nots.

"While many households are doing fine and economic activity overall has been expanding at a solid pace, large segments of the population are facing high levels of economic insecurity and financial strain, and consumer sentiment on the whole has dropped to low levels," economists at the New York Fed wrote in a blog post.

By comparison, in 2020 just 4% of households reported missing meals, including less than 7% of families earning less than $50,000 a year.

Food insecurity during the pandemic was offset in part by government relief payments and supplemental unemployment benefits, but those have long since ended. Food prices have also risen rapidly in the years since.

SHORT WAVE

Here's how hunger and food insecurity affect individuals — and whole societies

The New York Fed's most recent survey was conducted before the U.S. war with Iran, which caused a spike in gasoline prices and added to economic stress.

"If you're adding on another $100 to your budget a month just to put gas in your car to get to work or drop your kids at school and whatever they need their car for, where is that $100 coming from?" asks Breitmann. "Most typically, they're having to pull it from the grocery budget."

The New York Fed survey also found a growing number of people relying on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits today, even though eligibility for the program has been tightened. Nearly 18% of families surveyed this year had received SNAP benefits — up from 10.6% in 2020. Among lower-income families, more than 38% are receiving SNAP benefits, compared with about 22% six years ago.

The Agriculture Department, which oversees the food assistance program, halted its own research on food insecurity last year, saying the studies did "nothing more than fear monger."

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THE COLORADO SUN

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NEWS: TECHNOLOGY

New technology helps first responders overcome digital dead zones in San Luis Valley

A local internet provider is offering free Wi-Fi connection to police, firefighters and paramedics to help them stay connected in remote communities where cell service fails

Olivia Prentzel

4:01 AM MDT on Mar 31, 2026

Cell phone and rural broadband towers in Alamosa County, Colorado with the Sangre de Cristos in distance on Jan. 22, 2021. (John McEvoy Special to The Colorado Sun)

There's a 12-mile stretch of highway outside the town of La Veta, below the shadows of the Spanish Peaks in southern Colorado, where Fire Chief Ron Jameson knows a cellphone call from his crews rarely goes through.

For paramedics racing patients across six counties to San Luis Valley Health's hospitals, large pockets without cell service or internet access leaves them isolated and unable to update doctors on the condition of their patients, EMS manager Adam Daniels said. In some spots, even their radios go quiet.

Longtime paramedic Ryan Daugherty knows many of the gaps by heart: He can get 5G service near the highway just west of Crestone and atop 14,000-foot peaks, but in the middle, "there's nothing."

"There are some places where cellphones work," Daugherty said, only half joking, "but it's only if you're standing on one leg facing east and then if you hop onto your right leg, your cellphone signal will drop."

For emergencies that unfold in these digital dead zones, delays in care are often unavoidable.

But new technology is starting to close those gaps. Across rural communities in the San Luis Valley, first responders can now tap into Wi-Fi transmitted by a local internet provider, allowing crews to relay patient information and receive real-time medical guidance and help shave critical minutes off response times and improve care.

The program, called SmartTown for First Responders, allows police, EMTs, nurses and firefighters to tap into about 9,000 hot spots across the valley. When emergency personnel pull up to a home in a dead zone, their equipment automatically connects to the network.

Members of Jade Communications help train the volunteer paramedics and firefighters with La Veta Fire Protection District on how to use SmartTown for First Responders in September 2025. (Photo courtesy of Jordan Wehe)

"It's secure and it allows for fast transmission of data from that first responder's device to a hospital or to a team back at the medical center," said Jordan Wehe, co-CEO of Jade Communications.

First responders can access SmartTown anywhere within Jade's service area. The Alamosa-based internet provider has been investing in the San Luis Valley for more than a decade and was awarded federal dollars last year through the **Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment Program**, known as BEAD, to help continue the state's efforts to **get reliable internet access to underserved households**.

Patient information is protected

The technology has cybersecurity defense, so no viruses or malware can access medical data or a patient's personal information, Wehe said.

It's also pretty easy to use, he said, explaining that first responders don't have to ask for a Wi-Fi password, but instead are automatically connected to the network.

"There's none of this fumbling around, especially when a life is on the line," he said.

All paramedics through San Luis Valley Health were given access to SmartTown last fall, along with La Veta Fire Protection District, a volunteer-run agency providing both fire and ambulance services.

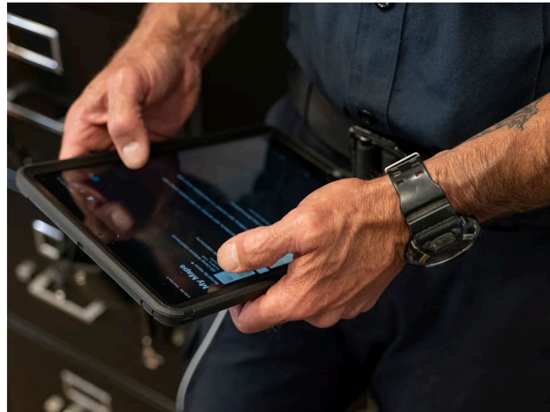
Wehe's team is now working to expand access to police, fire and other emergency personnel responding to calls in the valley.

The service, Wehe said, is also intended to connect Jade's customers while they are hiking in remote areas where there is limited or no cell service.

Before the availability of SmartTown, paramedics often had to wait until they reached a signal to contact the hospital, Daniels of SLV Health said.

"In emergency medicine, that delay means the hospital is reacting to the patient upon arrival rather than preparing for them in advance, or in some cases, care is being delayed because medical control must be contacted before proceeding," Daniels said in an email.

Medical teams, which use tablets to collect patient information and vitals, can now send data to hospitals from the scene.



"We can't broadcast through a mountain": Digital dead zones getting in the way of Colorado's first responders

▶ FULL STORY

"Having high-speed Wi-Fi available in residential and community areas gives us a critical 'Plan B' when radios or cell signals fail," Daniels said. "We can now transmit EKG data and patient updates from scenes that used to be total communication blackouts."

Daugherty, a flight paramedic who transports patients from the San Luis Valley to larger hospitals along the Front Range, said the service has allowed him to access real-time

medical support midair.

During one recent flight, he was traveling over a remote area outside of Fort Garland, flying about 150 mph at 1,000 feet, and still connected to SmartTown networks below.

“It’s a very new kind of technology,” said Daugherty, who has used SmartTown for about a year. “But it lit up the San Luis Valley like a Christmas tree with Wi-Fi connectivity.”

On another flight, he briefly connected to a SmartTown hotspot while passing overhead and was able to quickly look up the exact dosage for a medication mid-transport.

“It was loading, loading, loading, and then all of a sudden I hit a SmartTown hotspot and it loaded,” he said. “I got the answers I needed and did what I needed to do. It was a one-minute deal. … But that made the difference in me waiting or guessing or being absolutely sure of what I needed to do.”

Daugherty, who has also worked as a ground paramedic, on search and rescue teams and as a firefighter, for 18 years, said the connectivity will also help agencies set up command posts for large search efforts and wildfires.

“Before, you were kind of trying to run it off your cellphone hotspot or something like that, which is slow and inconsistent,” he said.

The new technology could be valuable for small, rural departments, often staffed entirely by volunteers with limited resources before state or federal help arrives, he added.

Jameson, the La Veta fire chief who oversees about 20 volunteers covering 220 square miles, said the technology hasn’t changed how they respond, just how well equipped they are.

“We still do our jobs the same way,” he said. “It’s just more tools in our toolbox.”

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Democracy Dies in Darkness

Opinion

Can this Texas law crack America's housing problem?

Sometimes, solving a major economic challenge just requires local government to step aside.

Today at 12:15 p.m. EDT

By Julia R. Cartwright

Julia R. Cartwright is a senior research fellow in law and economics at the American Institute for Economic Research.

Myriad forces are driving America's housing crunch, but one of the most significant and most fixable is restrictive zoning: a maze of local land-use rules that add costs and delays to building new homes. Texas legislators may have found a pragmatic solution that pushes certain housing projects forward without endless hearings and rezoning battles.

Early evidence suggests the Lone Star State's embrace of by-right zoning has allowed developers to build more housing without requiring a sweeping overhaul of local zoning codes. If other states follow suit, they could ease the housing shortage while growing their economies and populations.

While estimates of the U.S. housing problem vary widely, the squeeze is undeniable. The housing deficit is driven largely by local permitting red tape, restrictive zoning that often jacks up construction costs and prevents housing from being built. Estimates suggest zoning restrictions and land-use regulations account for 24 to over 40 percent of construction costs for new single- and multifamily housing, respectively.

A 2019 analysis of 11 U.S. cities and suburbs found that 75 percent or more of residential land was zoned exclusively for detached single-family homes. While this may preserve neighborhood aesthetics — think: no rowhouses, duplexes, condominiums or apartment buildings — it limits the supply of starter homes and makes it harder for newcomers to get their feet in the door. Restrictive zoning has helped push the median age of first-time home buyers to about 40, an all-time high.

Unsurprisingly, the cities with the strictest zoning systems tend to have the highest housing costs. The average monthly rent in San Francisco and New York City is $3,743 and $4,068, respectively, far above the national average of around $2,000.

Houston offers a sharp contrast. The city operates without a traditional zoning code, relying instead on building codes, development ordinances and private deed restrictions to guide land use. Houston's approach is not a perfect fix, but its flexibility has helped keep housing relatively affordable, with average rent around $1,875.

Texas lawmakers resolved to implement such a model statewide. Effective September 2025, cities with more than 150,000 residents in counties with more 300,000 must allow by-right multifamily housing on commercially zoned land. In practice, this means developers can build projects with three or more units and even mixed-use developments without having to go through lengthy rezoning battles or costly discretionary approval processes.

Under the previous system, most Texas developers had to seek rezoning approvals, obtain zoning variances and potentially attend lengthy public hearings before construction could begin. This would delay projects for months or even prohibit them outright, introducing uncertainty into development decisions. Projects that technically complied with planning guidelines could still be hindered or blocked if they encountered political opposition during public hearings. By-right zoning simplifies the process: If a project meets predetermined standards for density and height, it can move forward without discretionary approval.

Early signs suggest the policy is already working as planned. Within two months of the law taking effect, Dallas reportedly received roughly 60 inquiries from developers about potential new housing projects. Much of the developer interest centers on "missing middle" housing, small buildings that bridge the gap between single-family homes and large apartment complexes. These smaller projects can add housing supply while blending more naturally into existing neighborhoods. The reform applies to 19 of Texas's largest cities, including Dallas, San Antonio, Austin and Irving.

The policy is not without challenges. Commercial districts may require infrastructure upgrades to accommodate residential density, including improvements to water systems, sewer capacity and transportation networks. Local opposition could also persist in subtler ways, as cities still control permitting processes and utility connections that could slow development even without formal zoning hearings.

Even so, the broader economic stakes are clear. Texas has been one of the fastest-growing states in the country, gaining two congressional seats after the 2020 census. The state gained nearly 813,000 residents through domestic migration between 2020 and 2025. Meanwhile, New York and California each lost one congressional seat after the recent census, and their delegations are projected to continue shrinking. Between 2020 and 2025, the populations of California and New York lost roughly 1.7 million and 1.1 million residents through domestic migration, respectively. There's a housing lesson to be learned from those population shifts. States that make it easier to build homes attract workers, businesses and investment. Those that don't drive residents elsewhere.

Texas is not redesigning the housing market from the ground up. It is embracing a simpler idea: Let developers build housing when projects meet clear rules in areas not originally intended for housing. If other states adopted similar reforms, they could ease housing shortages, support economic growth and make it easier for younger Americans to own their first home.

Sometimes solving a major economic challenge does not require an elaborate new policy. It simply requires local governments to step aside.

NEWS Friday, April 03, 2026

Why 90% of local governments could be disqualified from Proposition 123 funding

Plus: Jared Polis' new policy on ICE. Heidi Ganahl's thoughts on the GOP gubernatorial field. Rose Pugliese blocked from Mesa County ballot.

By Brian Eason, Taylor Dolven + Jesse Paul

Reporter | Reporter | Reporter

The Holmes Hardware Company building in Pueblo reopened in 2023 as the Fuel & Iron Food Hall, featuring restaurants and 28 affordable apartments. (Mike Sweeney, Special to The Colorado Sun)

The vast majority of local governments in Colorado could be barred from receiving affordable housing funding through Proposition 123 for the next three years unless the state legislature steps in to prevent it.

The problem stems from a provision in the 2022 ballot measure that was

designed to hold local governments accountable for increasing the supply of affordable housing. To remain eligible for the $350 million a year that the measure generates, cities and counties must show that they're increasing their local supply of affordable housing by 3% every three-year funding cycle.

But housing advocates — including those who wrote the ballot measure — say the requirement approved by voters has proved impossible for some communities to meet. And, if lawmakers don't pass a bill to change the rules, a provision designed to incentivize affordable housing could have the opposite effect: Upward of 90% of local governments enrolled in Proposition 123 could be disqualified from the funding cycle that starts Jan. 1 because they aren't meeting the 3% target.

"Ultimately the goal is creating more housing, right?" state Rep. **Rebekah Stewart**, D-Lakewood, said at a March committee hearing. "It set goals that certain jurisdictions were never, never going to be able to hit — (affordable housing) goals that exceeded the amount of building permits that they actually issue year over year. Just completely unrealistic — unachievable."

Lawmakers and the Polis administration have proposed a fix in House Bill 1313, which is headed to the Senate after passing the House on Thursday. Stewart is cosponsoring the bill alongside House Speaker Pro Tem **Andrew Boesenecker**, D-Fort Collins, and Sen. **Matt Ball**, D-Denver.

But the proposed solution — a complex formula that gives local governments various paths to maintain eligibility under the law — is raising fresh questions about what sorts of housing taxpayers should be incentivizing in the first place.

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AN UNREALISTIC GOAL

Pueblo is among those that would be disqualified under the current rules, officials say, in large part because the city's relatively inexpensive housing stock counts toward its base number of existing affordable units. A bigger base makes the 3% growth target that much harder to reach.

Ironically, Pueblo would be punished for still having a lot of naturally occurring affordable housing — one of the things Proposition 123 directs the state to protect. And the result would be a loss of state funding for a city with a high concentration of poverty — the people who need the most help affording rent.

The median household income in Pueblo is $56,664 — 40% less than the state as a whole.

"We must produce 1,206 new deed-restricted or Proposition 123-funded affordable housing units over a three-year cycle," **Melissa Cook**, the city's director of housing and citizen services, told the House Committee on Transportation, Housing and Local Government.

"This is more residential units than the city of Pueblo has ever created in any three-year cycle in decades, let alone of documented affordable housing."

Under the formula proposed in House Bill 1313, each community would have a different target based on how much housing is already being built there, and how quickly an area is adding jobs. A city that issued 3,000 housing permits over the past three years, for instance, would need to add about 300 affordable homes over the next three years to stay in compliance, assuming they add jobs at about the state average. Local governments would also be able to apply for a waiver if they miss the new target but can demonstrate "good faith" effort to the state.

Some units count extra toward the goal as an incentive for things like building for-sale housing, donating public land for projects or developing deeply affordable housing for the lowest income families.

Low-income housing groups, including Housing Colorado, Enterprise Community Partners and Archway Communities, pushed the bill's sponsors to add incentives for preserving the affordable housing the state already has, much which is at risk of being lost as housing costs rise and federal rent restrictions expire in coming years.

But while the housing committee agreed to amend the bill to count preservation projects toward each community's target, no one offered an amendment to incentivize preservation.

amendment to incentivize preservation.

As we reported last month, even though voters required the state to fund preservation through Proposition 123, state administrators have approved very few such projects.

WHAT TO WATCH IN THE WEEK AHEAD

- The legislature is off today in observance of Good Friday.
- The state budget will be debated in the Colorado House starting Monday, when the long bill and its associated legislation start to be heard in the House Appropriations Committee. It's possible the budget bills could be heard in the Appropriations Committee on Tuesday, too, before the measures move to the full House for debate.

Budget coverage:

- **Lawmakers finish drafting Colorado's budget with final round of major cuts to address roughly $1.5 billion shortfall**
- **Colorado budget writers pick new contract with private prison company over new state-run facility to deal with inmate growth**

SUMMIT DAILY

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Tourism slowdown, rising inflation and steady consumer spending shape Breckenridge financial outlook, economist says

News News | May 5, 2026

Allison Moore Follow
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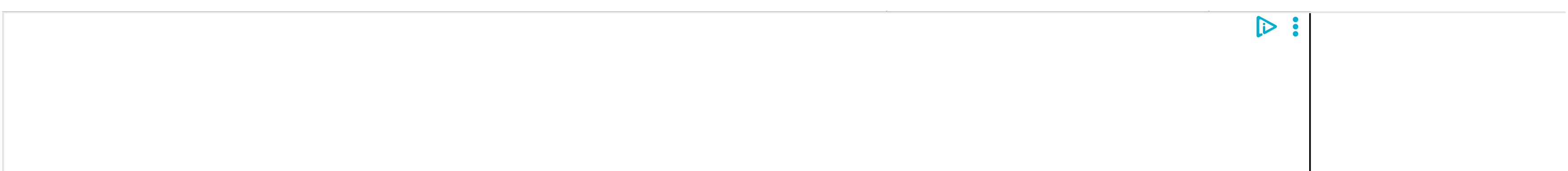
Main Street in Breckenridge is pictured Thursday, Aug. 19, 2023. The town received a financial and economic update from a professor that explained how 2026 is shaping up.
Tripp Fay/For the Summit Daily News

An economist with the University of Colorado Boulder told Breckenridge Town Council last week that the town's tourism-driven economy is sending mixed signals heading into local budget season, with resilient consumer spending somewhat offset by slowing economic growth, a shrinking labor force and a nationwide rise in inflation.

At a work session Tuesday, April 28, Professor Brian Lewandowski of the Leeds School of Business outlined six key themes shaping both Colorado's economy and Breckenridge's local outlook, emphasizing the idiosyncrasies of mountain town economies compared to broader national trends.

First, Lewandowski said economic growth has been weaker than expected. Breckenridge and Summit County typically outperform the national economy when conditions are strong, but Lewandowski said the region feels slowdowns more acutely.

"When the U.S. economy flourishes, Breckenridge tends to do a little bit better," Lewandowski said. "But the reverse is also true."



At the same time, the state's labor force is shrinking after peaking in 2025 — a trend Lewandowski largely attributed to an aging population and slower in-migration among working-age residents. That pattern is mirrored locally, with Summit County's labor force still below its pre-pandemic peak in 2019.

"It's not just a slow recovery from COVID," Lewandowski said, pointing to a line graph showing a significant dip in the number of employees statewide following the 2020 COVID-driven economic shutdown. "We're having trouble maintaining what we had even a year ago."

Despite fewer workers, wages are rising, Lewandowski said. Summit County saw employment decline slightly over the last two years, but total wages have increased, resulting in roughly $70 million more in annual income compared with the previous year. Lewandowski said that income growth in the county is currently outpacing inflation, offering some cushion for households.

A softening tourism economy

Lewandowski also emphasized that Summit County's economy remains heavily concentrated in just three sectors, with nearly two-thirds of all workers employed in tourism, retail-related industries or professional and business services. Those employment patterns are consistently seasonal, as Breckenridge's employment rate peaks in the winter months and slows during the summertime.

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That structure, Lewandowski said, leaves Breckenridge's economy particularly dependent on visitor spending, which makes up nearly two-thirds of overall economic activity.

"We pay a lot of attention to how the consumer is doing," Lewandowski said.

While tourism has slowed over the last two years, consumer behavior has remained surprisingly strong, Lewandowski said. Retail sales continue to grow annually, with spending increasing even on discretionary items.

"To me, that signals that the consumer is actually in a little bit better shape than I would have expected them to be in this moment," Lewandowski said.

Lewandowski also said higher tax refunds this year could further support consumer spending by boosting disposable income, acting as a "sort of stimulus."

Still, local indicators show some softening. Breckenridge has seen slower growth in net taxable sales compared with the state benchmark, Lewandowski said, including a 2.4% decline in 2025. Seasonal swings are also expected to remain pronounced.

Inflation, drought complicate Breckenridge's budget season

Nationwide inflation pressures are re-emerging after cooling in 2024 and 2025, Lewandowski said. The rate of inflation in Colorado is outpacing the national average.

Lewandowski pointed to energy prices as a key driver of statewide inflation, describing the recent spike as the fastest increase in energy prices since the 1980s.

Gas prices alone rose roughly 75% over a four-month period. Lewandowski said that shift can erode consumer confidence and redirect household spending away from travel and discretionary purchases.

"Those changes weigh on consumer confidence," Lewandowski said, warning that higher fuel and heating costs could limit how much visitors are willing to spend in resort communities like Breckenridge.

Even with wage gains, Lewandowski said, rising costs for essentials may force consumers to cut back elsewhere.

Lewandowski also flagged growing vulnerability to climate-related disruptions, including severe — and historic — drought conditions across the west that threaten tourism.

Following Lewandowski's presentation, Mayor Kelly Owens and members of the council probed how these trends should influence the town's upcoming budget decisions. Breckenridge town officials will enter budget season in the fall.

Owens asked how Breckenridge compares with peer mountain destinations like Steamboat Springs or Crested Butte, and whether public investment in amenities and events can be linked to long-term sales growth.

"I wish we could pinpoint — is there any way to track public investment into amenities and events and things like that that might attract visitors over the course of a few years among the different communities? And is there a correlation to sales growth?" Owens asked.

Council member Steve Gerard asked about the implications of rising remote work in the county, as Lewandowski reported that the number of reported remote workers in Summit County has more than doubled since 2019.

Owens also pressed Lewandowski on Breckenridge's broader financial outlook.

"Are you feeling good that we might continue a slow rate of growth, or are you feeling like we're going into a pretty low, slow period?" she asked.

Lewandowski said the outlook remains uncertain and shaped by competing forces. He said he's hesitant to give a more direct answer yet. While last year he warned that tariffs could slow the economy, consumer spending has remained resilient.

New risks, however, are emerging, Lewandowski said. He pointed to artificial intelligence-driven employee layoffs and continued energy price volatility.

Overall, Lewandowski said, Breckenridge's economy relies heavily on visitation.

"Ultimately, the greater economy here is dependent on people showing up," he said. "Even if you have a wealthy base that continues to consume, what does it mean for the hotel business or the restaurant business and those employees if visitation declines?"

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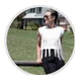
Who is Boulder for?

The hollowing out of our once generative city...



JILL ADLER GRANO

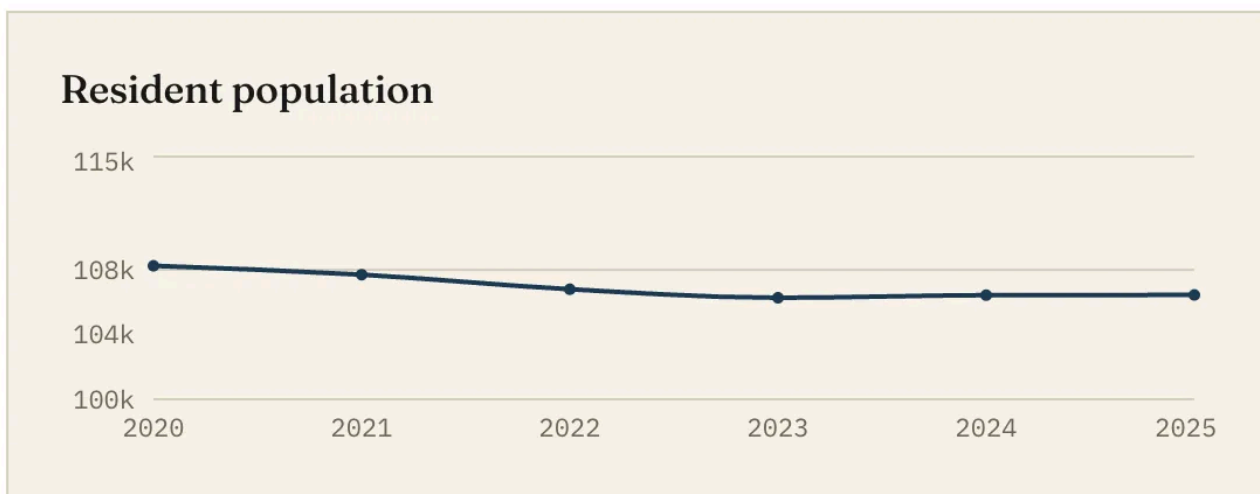
APR 28, 2026

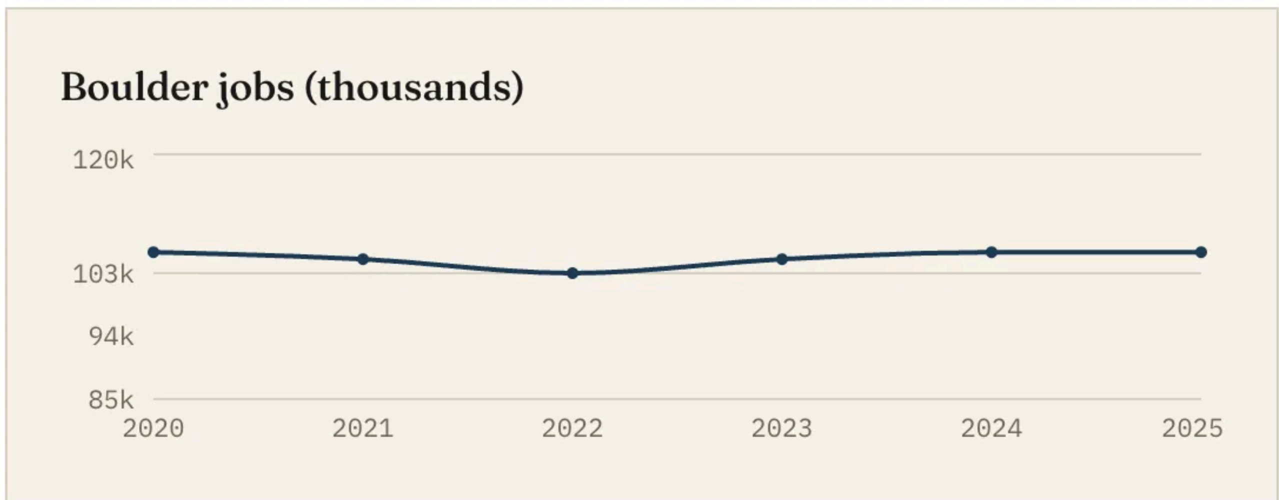
89 7 Sh

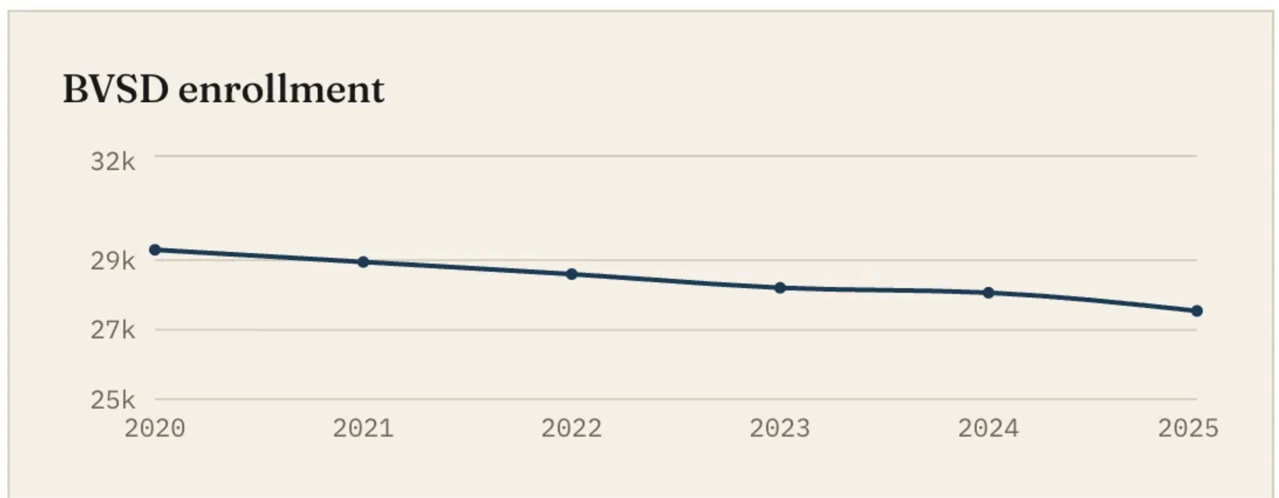
Most people who have lived in Boulder a while can feel that something has shifte Beloved restaurants and watering holes are closing. Downtown offices sit empty. Neighborhoods are dark at night. There are fewer children in the streets. *Boulder fe hollowed out — less vibrant, less innovative, less community-centered.*

This is more than a *feeling*. The heartbeat of Boulder has flatlined, and the numbers show it...

The first sign that a city is declining is not a sudden crisis. It is the flatlining of the indicators that show a city is alive — population, jobs, schools. **In healthy communities, these lines climb. In Boulder, despite thousands of new housing un and a growing CU student body, they've stalled. The graphs below are the canarie the coalmine.**





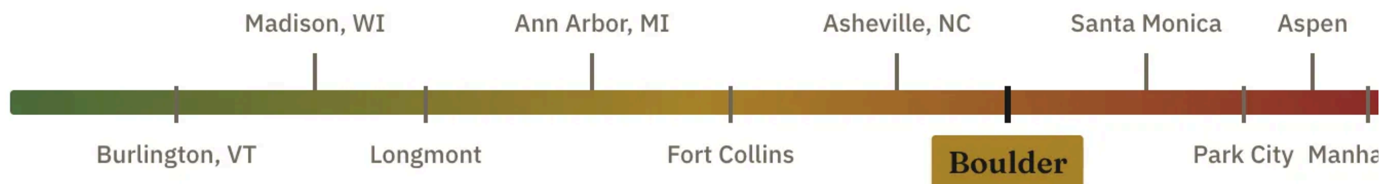


Years of studying Boulder have given me a useful way to describe what's happening here.

Cities sit on a spectrum.

On one end, a generative city — where housing houses people, wages drive the economy, and families can stay. **On the other end, an extractive city** — where hous is an asset class, downtowns serve visitors, and the people who own the city do not in it. Most places fall somewhere between. **Boulder is sliding toward the extractive end.**

From Generative to Extractive. Where Boulder is — and where we are headed ...



GENERATIVE

Housing is housing. People who live in the city work in the city. New construction becomes new households. Third places grow. The local economy compounds.

EXTRACTIV

Housing is an asset class. The people who own the cit do not live in it. Residents are priced out. The loc economy is replaced by tourism, finance, and secon home service

**Positions are qualitative, triangulated from three measurable indicators: second-home sha of the housing stock, commercial vacancy rates, and the ratio of median home price to loca median household income.*

Why is this happening?

Where a city sits on this spectrum is not a matter of fate — it is the accumulated re of choices made (or not made) over decades. My thesis chronicles Boulder's land-us decisions in depth, since colonization. (Read it here or by scanning the QR code below.)

When you look at our history, you can see today's problems taking root long before they surface. **There is no single cause. But certain patterns recur … and we are not talking about them nearly enough.**

Boulder's economy is becoming less local.

Boulder is increasingly owned by outside capital. Money that once circulated here
flows to distant investors. ***Every city needs capital. But capital can serve households or shareholders. It can build shared prosperity or concentrate wealth.***

Blackstone Capital — the world's largest alternative asset manager — owns over $800 million of Boulder.

RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY

334

housing units across multiple Boulder apartment complexes

COMMERCIAL PROPERTY

22

buildings, totaling roughly one million square feet of commercial space

And that is just the tip of the iceberg… these are just a few of the holdings I have be
able to uncover through public records research. Beyond Blackstone, I have found a

least **226 more housing units** in Boulder owned by other publicly traded REITs, plu many additional commercial buildings owned by national investment funds.

A tenant in these buildings is not renting from a Boulder landlord. Th are renting from a line item in a billionaire asset manager's portfolio.

So why does private equity want Boulder? The obvious answer is the land and the rents — high-demand, supply-constrained markets like ours produce reliable yields But the deeper answer is securitization. After mortgage-backed securities nearly collapsed the global economy in 2008, Blackstone invented a successor instrument: rent-backed security. In 2013, it bundled rental income from thousands of rental homes into a $479 million bond — the first of its kind — and Wall Street oversubscribed the offering six times over. ***In other words, rent itself has become a tradable asset class.*** **Boulder housing is no longer just property; it is collateral for bonds sold on the secondary market, in a multibillion-dollar industry that depend on buying up homes in cities exactly like ours. The pressure to raise rents and remove tenants is no longer a landlord's choice... It is built into the bond.**

> *Finance in America has stopped being a tool for the real economy a has become, instead, an end in itself — an industry that serves its ov interests rather than the interests of the people and the places whe it operates.*
>
> — PARAPHRASING RANA FOROOHAR, MAKERS AND TAKERS (2016)

It is not just global capital consuming the city. It is wealthy second-home owners, too.

An estimated 1,000-4,000 units sit vacant or grossly underutilized. A decade of population stagnation amid new construction reveals that housing increasingly functions as a store of wealth rather than as shelter.

I examined hundreds of public records and found…

34%

A point-in-time analysis of five luxury townhome and condominium complexes near downtown Boulder — units priced from $1 million to $5 million — showed an average of one-third are non-owner occupied.

32.4%

A point-in-time analysis of single-family homes that sold for $4 million and above between January 2021 and December 2023 revealed that 32.4% are non-owner occupied, second homes.

For many of you, this will come as no surprise. Countless Boulder residents have watched as their neighborhoods have become darker at night than they once were.

This Robb Report article below says it all…

Forget Aspen. Buyers Are Avoiding Crowds and Snapping Up Luxury Homes in Boulder Instead.

The city has seen an uptick in high-end real estate sales which has raised the average luxury home price to more tha million.

And we are losing more than homes…

Sociologist Ray Oldenburg called them "third places": the bars, cafés, hot dog stand dive taverns, and gathering rooms where a city's residents actually live out their civ lives. They are what make a town feel like itself. Boulder has been losing them, one one…

Dark Horse

1975 – 2

51 years. Closed March 14, 2026 for Williams Village II redevelopment.

Mustard's Last Stand

1978 – 2

Nearly 50 years. Closing for city demolition of Park Central Building.

No Name Bar

– 2

Broadway institution. Closed in 2021; building redeveloped.

Red Letter Secondhand Books

1990 – 2

After 31 years on Pearl Street, displaced when its building was demolished for a new mixed-use commercial-and-residential development.

East Pearl Industrial

Under thr

Proposed redevelopment would displace long-standing light-industrial uses and workspace.

Some loss is inevitable. Private property rights and by-right development mean we will alw lose places we loved. That is not the problem. The problem is what replaces them.

When a beloved corner bar is torn down so ground-floor retail can be leased at rent pegged to a pro forma — rents that, by design, cannot go down — the loss is not jus the bar. It is the structural impossibility of anything like it ever existing in that spa again.

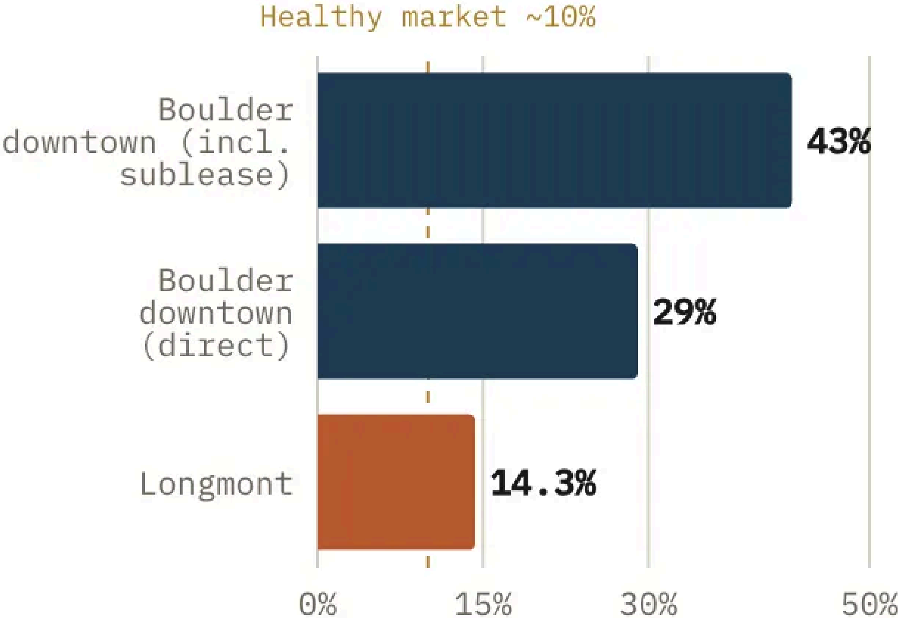
We are told that this is just the way of the post-COVID world, but comparable college cities around the country prove otherwise.

Just down the road, Longmont demonstrates that it does not have to be this way...

Longmont — fifteen miles away, in the same county, with a similar budget and population — serves as a reference point throughout the remainder of this post. **No because Longmont is the goal. Because Longmont is the proof that Boulder's trajectory is a choice.**

Commercial Vacancy.

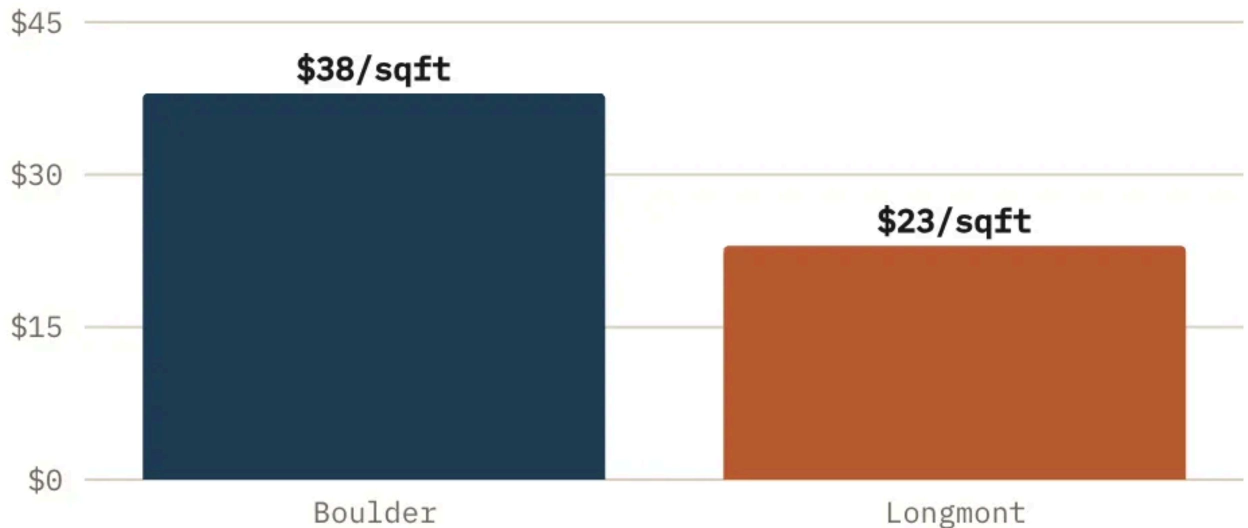
Boulder offices sit empty. Longmont's don't.



Downtown Boulder office vacancy has been stuck at 29% for three years, 43% when sublease space is included. Longmont sits at 14%. Both cities lost tenants to the pos COVID remote-work shift, but only one has failed to refill its vacancies. **When nobody's working in the buildings, nobody's eating at the restaurants, buying fro the stores, or walking the streets in the evening.**

Commercial Rent.

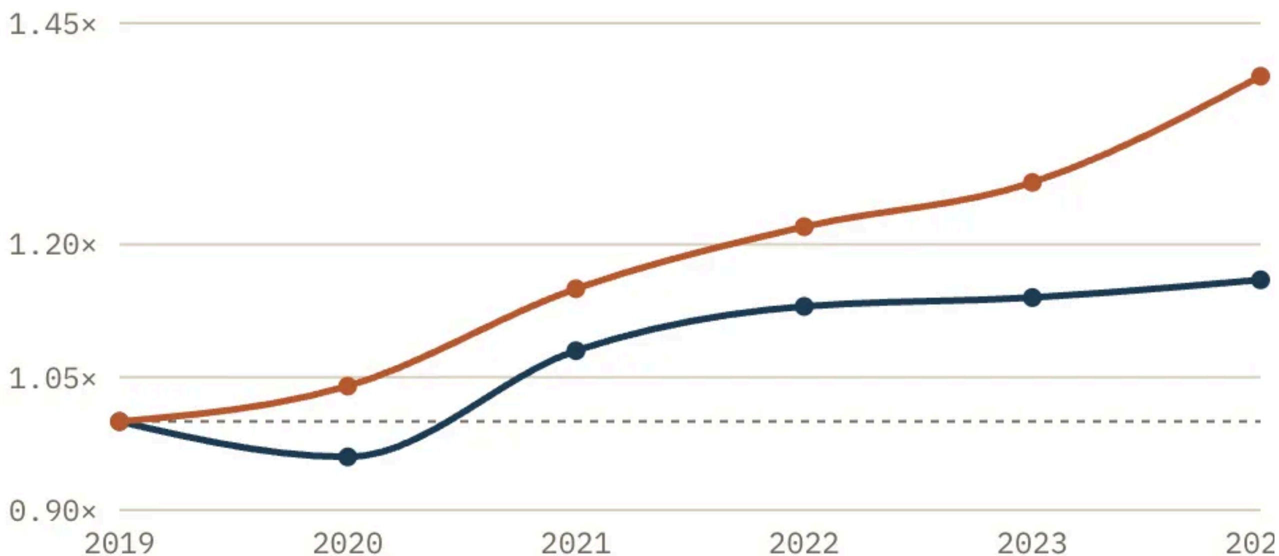
Boulder Class A rent is 65% higher than Longmont's.



Average asking rent for downtown office space: roughly $38/sqft in Boulder, $23/sqf
Longmont — a 65% Boulder premium. When businesses can travel 15 minutes dow
the road and escape it, why wouldn't they? The regional market has set the price fo
office space, but Boulder is stuck well above it. (Boulder landlords are quietly offeri
concessions — free rent for set periods, for example — to help fill buildings. But
concessions are closed-door arrangements that don't reset the market and don't sho
up in published rent averages.)

Sales Tax Revenue.

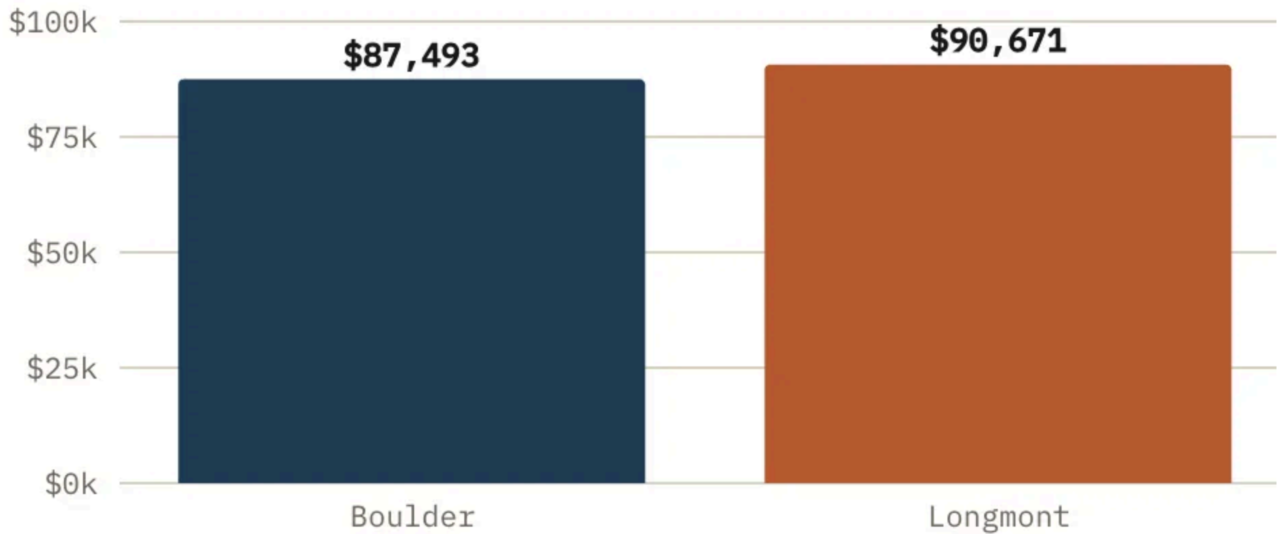
Longmont's real economy is growing. Boulder's is stalling.



Indexed to 2019 = 1.00. Longmont sales and use tax revenue has grown roughly 39% since 2019. Boulder’s has grown about 16% — and most of that growth comes from out-of-city online sales under its 2020 Marketplace Facilitator ordinance. **Boulder’s city sales tax peaked in 2022 and has declined since. A falling in-city sales tax me that fewer people are buying from local stores.**

Wages.

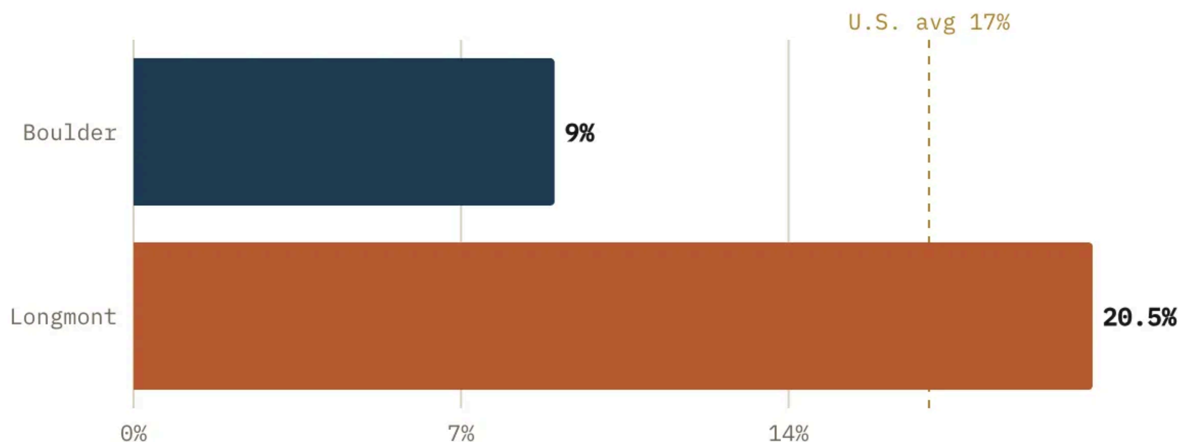
Longmont now earns more.



Longmont has passed Boulder — the city of CU, IBM, Google, and venture capital -
in terms of what its households actually earn. **Boulder's wealth has moved from wa
into property.** Note: HUD's Area Median Income (set at the county MSA level) is identical for both cities at $146,000 for a family of four; the figures shown here are actual city-level household medians, which diverge.

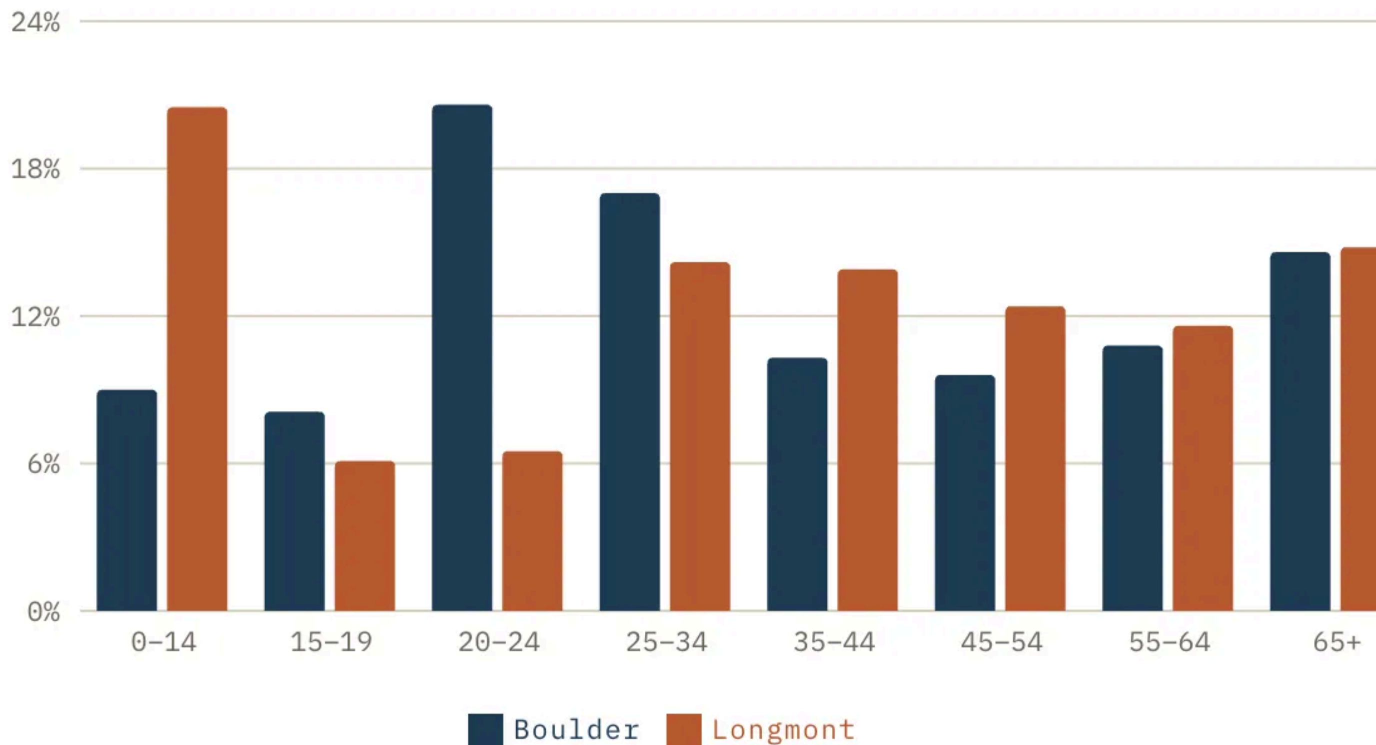
Children and families.

Half as many children as Longmont. Half as many as the nation.



9% of Boulder residents are aged 0–14, compared to 20.5% in Longmont. That is hal
the national average, and less than half of Longmont. A housing market that pulls i
capital but pushes out families eventually runs out of the children who make the cit
worth running. The consequence is Boulder Valley School District closures, and jus
less vibrancy. My 22-year-old trick-or-treated every Halloween with hundreds of ot
kids. My 12-year-old says, "Halloween in Boulder has been cancelled." This Octobe
check out Prospect in Longmont compared to any other neighborhood in Boulder.
kids don't need a graph to know what's up.

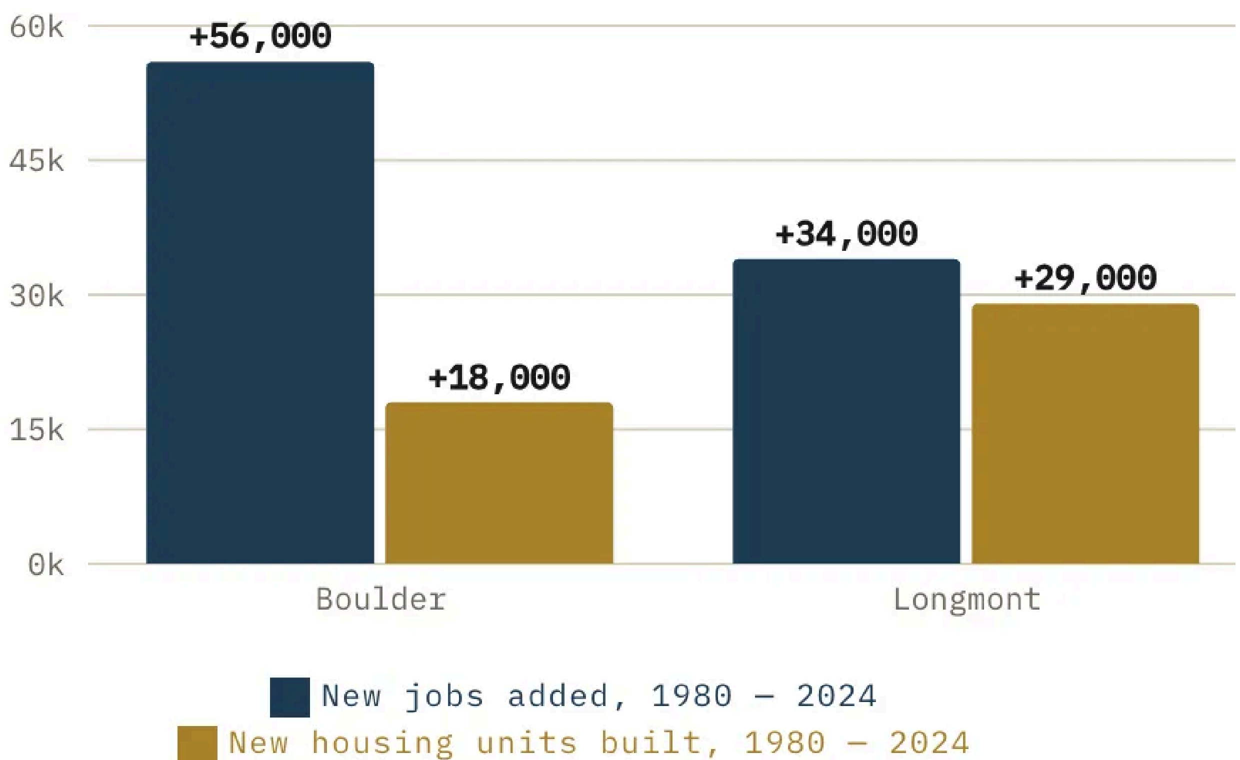
Demographics.



Longmont is a normal age pyramid: 20% children, a broad working-age middle, agi
seniors. Boulder is a barbell: one fifth of the city is ages 20–24 (students), children a
scarce, and working parents in their 30s and 40s are underrepresented. This is what
city looks like when housing is too expensive for families to stay.

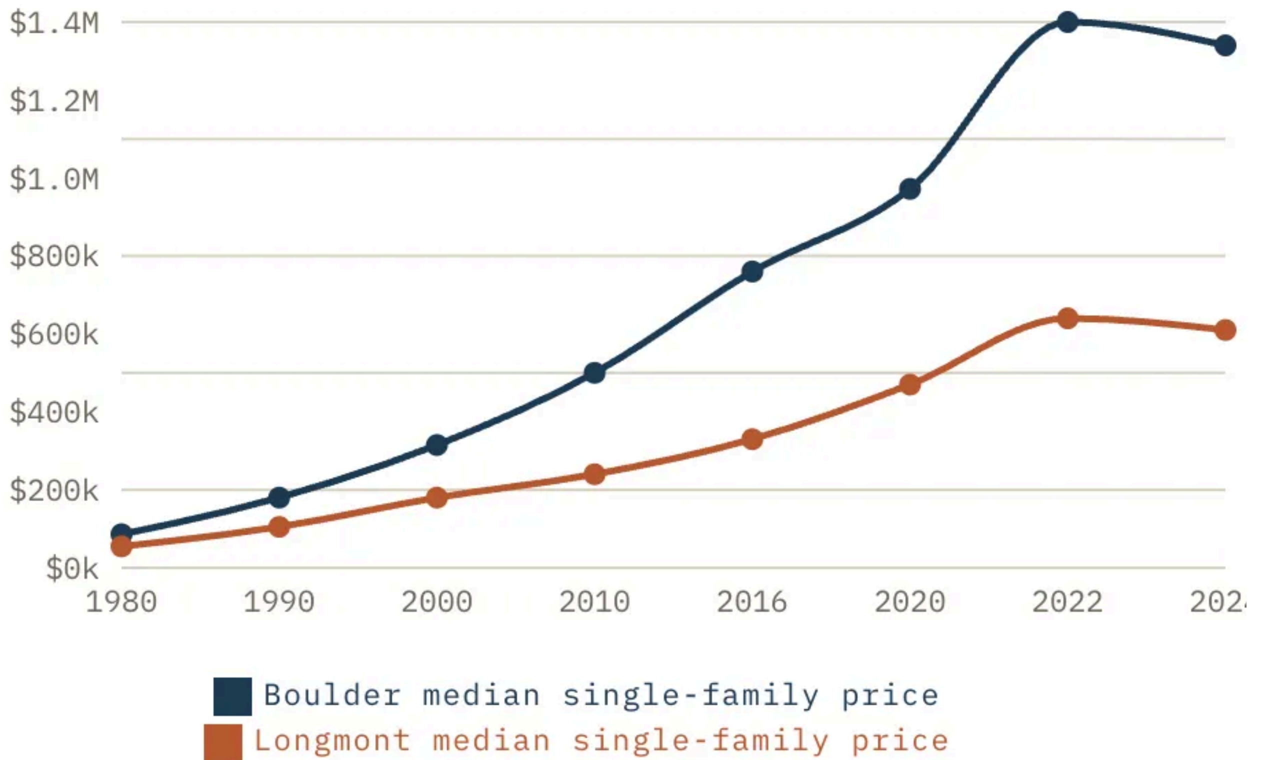
Boulder's scarcity is not an accident. It was built

Boulder's market is not expensive simply because Boulder is desirable. It is expensi
because supply was structurally prevented from responding to demand. Four decad
of land-use regulation produced two outcomes that the next two charts show direct
an enormous jobs-to-housing imbalance and a price run-up that cannot be explaine
by inflation or any ordinary market cycle.



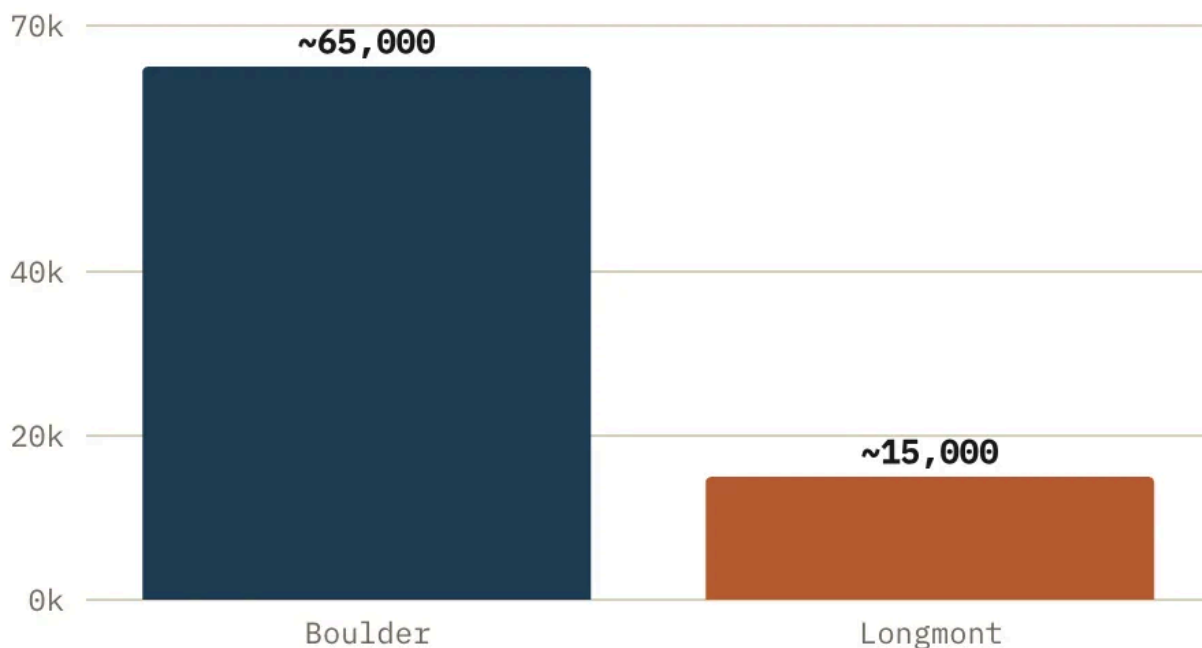
Between 1980 and 2024, Boulder added roughly 56,000 jobs and 18,000 housing unit
a more than 3:1 ratio. Longmont added roughly 34,000 jobs and 29,000 housing unit
close to 1:1. Same county, same region, same four decades. When housing productio

can respond to job growth, it does. **When regulation prevents it from responding, price becomes the only variable that can move**.



The Boulder–Longmont gap did not exist in 1980. The divergence is four decades o land-use policy, priced into real estate (my thesis documents this extensively). Boulder's median single-family home sold for about $86,000 in 1980. By 2024, it sell for around $1.34 million — after a peak above $1.4 million in 2022. Longmont, fiftee miles away, started in roughly the same range and is now at $610,000 — less than ha

Boulder's workforce drives in. Longmont's largel lives there.



Roughly 65,000 workers commute into Boulder from outside the city each day — ab two-thirds of the entire Boulder workforce. Longmont, by contrast, sees fewer than 15,000 daily in-commuters, most of them from nearby small towns rather than from sprawling regional catchment. Boulder's traffic, its climate footprint, its parking demand, and its persistent service-worker shortages all live in this gap.

Boulder's trajectory is the result of choices, whic means it can be answered differently.

We can relocalize the economy. We can build housing for the people who work her We can recover the third places, refill the schools, and keep the wealth that Boulde generates inside the community that generates it. Reclaiming the city is slow work, but it is the work before us.

The question for Boulder is: Does the city have the political will to match the scale the required transformation? Addressing our history requires not adjustment at the margins but structural recalibration – demand a-side regulation, non-market ownership, predictable development processes, and policies aligned with social equ rather than property protection

The question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from the question of what ki of people we want to be, what kinds of social relations we seek, what relations to nature we cherish, what style of daily life we desire, what kinds of technologies we deem appropriate, what aesthetic values we hold. The right to the city is, therefore, far more than a right of individual access to the resources that the city embodies: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city more after our heart's desire. — David Harvey, The Right to the City

p.s. In a follow-up piece, I'll lay out concrete strategies the Boulder community can to change course. There are proven ways to get local ownership back, to resist glob institutional capital, to balance housing with jobs, and to fill vacant spaces. In all o my policy recommendations, I draw on what other places have done to reverse this kind of trajectory. Stay tuned…

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LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Working group reaches consensus on fixes to Colorado AI regulations

A person types at a computer

POSTED BY: ED SEALOVER MARCH 17, 2026

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Five months after Gov. Jared Polis summoned business, education and consumer-rights advocates to break a two-year stalemate over artificial-intelligence regulation, the group has agreed to a plan on how the state should work to prevent discrimination by AI systems.

The agreement, announced Tuesday by the Democratic governor, should pave the way for legislators to propose and pass a consensus AI regulatory framework to replace widely derided rules that Polis **reluctantly signed into law** in May 2024. Those rules are scheduled to go into place at the end of June but would be replaced by a new stratagem that would require the Colorado Attorney General's Office instead to finish rulemaking by the end of 2026, just days before current AG Phil Weiser is termed out of office.

Colorado's 2024 law, originally scheduled to be enacted by this February, represented the most comprehensive AI regulation in the country but drew immediate criticism for provisions that tech companies said **would force AI developers to leave the state**. Among those were extremely detailed disclosures that deployers and developers must make about the risk of discrimination by AI and a review process that could have allowed consumers upset by AI decisions on everything from job applications to insurance approvals to petition developers and deployers for reconsideration.

Senate Majority Leader Robert Rodriguez, the Denver Democrat who sponsored the 2024 law, oversaw a task force that tried to iron out problems in the law in time for the 2025 session, but he ended up **killing his attempted fix** when few participants backed it. Two competing bills in the 2025 special session attempted again to rewrite regulations, but **disputes centered around liability issues** grounded both and led legislators simply to **postpone enactment of the law** until June of this year.

Governor turns to hand-picked group of AI experts

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This year's bill is different from
groups like Grand Junction Are
Here's why:

Tweets by TSSColorado

Latest News

Working group reaches consensus on fixes to Colorado AI regulations

Legislators restarting debate on protecting workers in extreme temperatures

March 16 "Colorado Chamber Office Hours": Alcohol tax and fee proposals

So, Polis **called together a working group in October** that met behind closed doors and hammered away at areas of disagreement, often with business and technology groups on one side of the table and civil-rights and labor groups on the other. As the pace of meetings picked up with the start of the 2026 session, participants bore down on issues of liability, appeals and several key definitions and produced what Polis on Tuesday called unanimous support for **a new AI regulatory framework**.

"I am very grateful to the hardworking members of the AI Policy Working Group that have reached a unanimous agreement on AI policy to protect consumers and support innovation in our state," the governor said in a news release Tuesday. "I look forward to supporting the recommended framework as legislation moves through the process and commend the AI Policy Work Group for their efforts to get us here."

The framework requires AI developers to notify deployers of the technology — from insurers to educational institutions to employers plowing through resumes — of how the system works and of any known risks and circumstances in which the system should not be used. These requirements would apply when a developer creates a system with the reasonable expectation that it may be used to make consequential decisions.

Rules would oversee consequential AI decisions

A deployer then must provide a "clear and conspicuous notice" to individuals when an automated decision-making technology is being used for a consequential decision about them. Such decisions involve:

- Educational enrollment or an educational opportunity;
- Employment or an employment opportunity;
- The lease or purchase of residential real estate;
- A financial or lending decision;

Bills seek to make alcohol producers pay more for substance-abuse, mental-health treatment

Revived bill to ban individualized price- and wage-setting gets initial approval

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This year's bill is different from
year's, but opposition from bus
groups like Grand Junction Are
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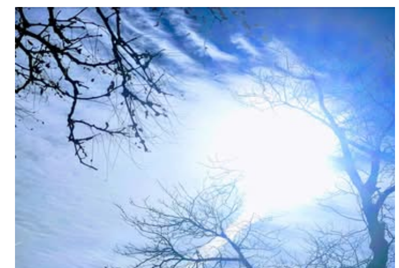
Here's why:



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Legislators restarting d

- Insurance decisions involving underwriting, pricing, coverage or claims adjudication;
- Provision of healthcare services; or,
- Eligibility and renewal determinations involving essential government services and public benefits.

If an AI system makes an adverse decision against an individual — say, it denies a healthcare service or turns someone down for a loan — the deployer shall provide within 30 days a description of the consequential decision and the role the AI system played in it. They also must offer instructions and a "simple-to-follow process" by which individuals can learn about the types of personal data that impacted the decision, as well as information on how someone can request a human-led review or reconsideration.

Appeals to be allowed when "commercially reasonable"

The wording in the proposed framework is narrower than in the 2024 law, which seemed to allow unlimited direct appeals to AI deployers — a possibility that some companies and educational institutions warned would have diverted most personnel to appeal cases. The proposed new framework directs the AG's office to adopt rules by Dec. 31 on post-adverse disclosures and to allow human review and reconsideration through them "to the extent commercially reasonable" while also letting consumers correct materially inaccurate personal data.

As to enforcement of the law, the proposal assigns exclusive authority to the AG's office, allowing it to seek civil penalties for violations, and it specifies that the bill would not create a new private right of action allowing the filing of civil lawsuits. It also gives deployers or developers 90 days after receiving notice to cure an alleged violation without incurring civil penalties, though it permits the AG to seek injunctive relief to prevent future violations.

Where the special-session bill ran aground over its proposed creation of joint and several liability for developers and deployers, the new framework would allocate fault among them based on their relative fault for the violation of the law. And it proposes to absolve developers of fault if deployers use the AI system in ways in which it wasn't intended, marketed or contracted for by the developer. Also, it doesn't limit the enforceability of contract terms agreed to between the deployer and developer.

Bill could reverse widespread criticism

The framework from the 2024 law has received criticism from President Donald Trump's administration and has been blamed for chilling growth in the AI sector, including tech giant Palantir's decision last month to relocate its headquarters from Denver to Miami. Sen. Mark Baisley, R-Woodland Park, quipped in the well of the Senate on Feb. 18, when a since-killed bill to decriminalize sex work was still under consideration: "Not to worry, because we're replacing that industry with the prostitution industry."

But through it all, the AI Policy Working Group continued to meet and to study national policy trends while pinpointing both its goals and the risks of potential wording of a new law, and the hard discussions led to the unanimous backing announced Tuesday.

Colorado Chamber of Commerce President/CEO Loren Furman, a member of that policy working group, said leaders managed to talk through initial policy differences and identify pathways of consensus on each of the identified areas. She was particularly happy about several of the solutions, including the assignment of liability and the barring of any new private right of action, and said she looks forward to the framework being introduced as a bill and moving forward in the Legislature.

"We found alignment with divergent groups in a lot of areas," Furman said Tuesday. "That doesn't mean there

won't be additional changes in the legislative process. But it's our hope that the majority or the bulk of the fundamentals stay in there, because it's taken a lot to get to this point."

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